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THE MARGARET STOKES LECTURES, 1913

MUIREDACH

ABBOT OF MONASTERBOICE 890–923 A.D.

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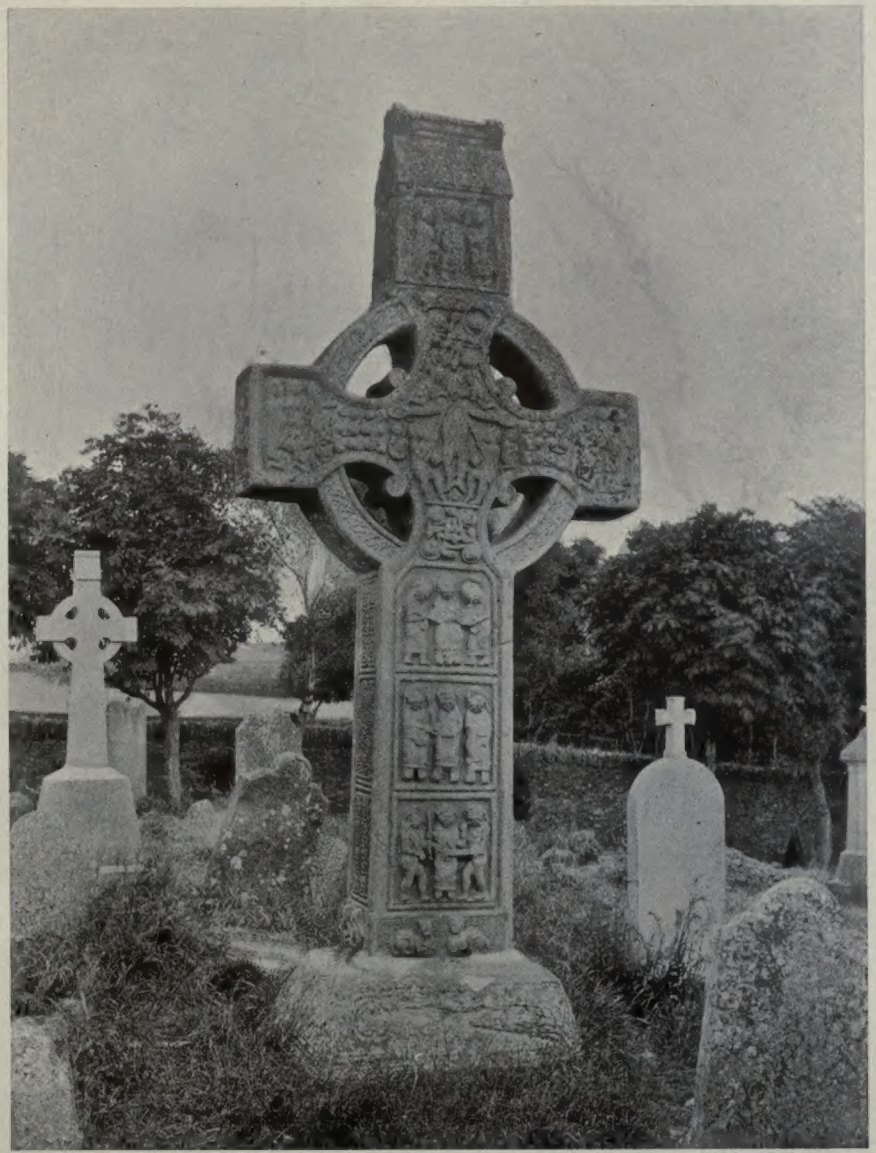
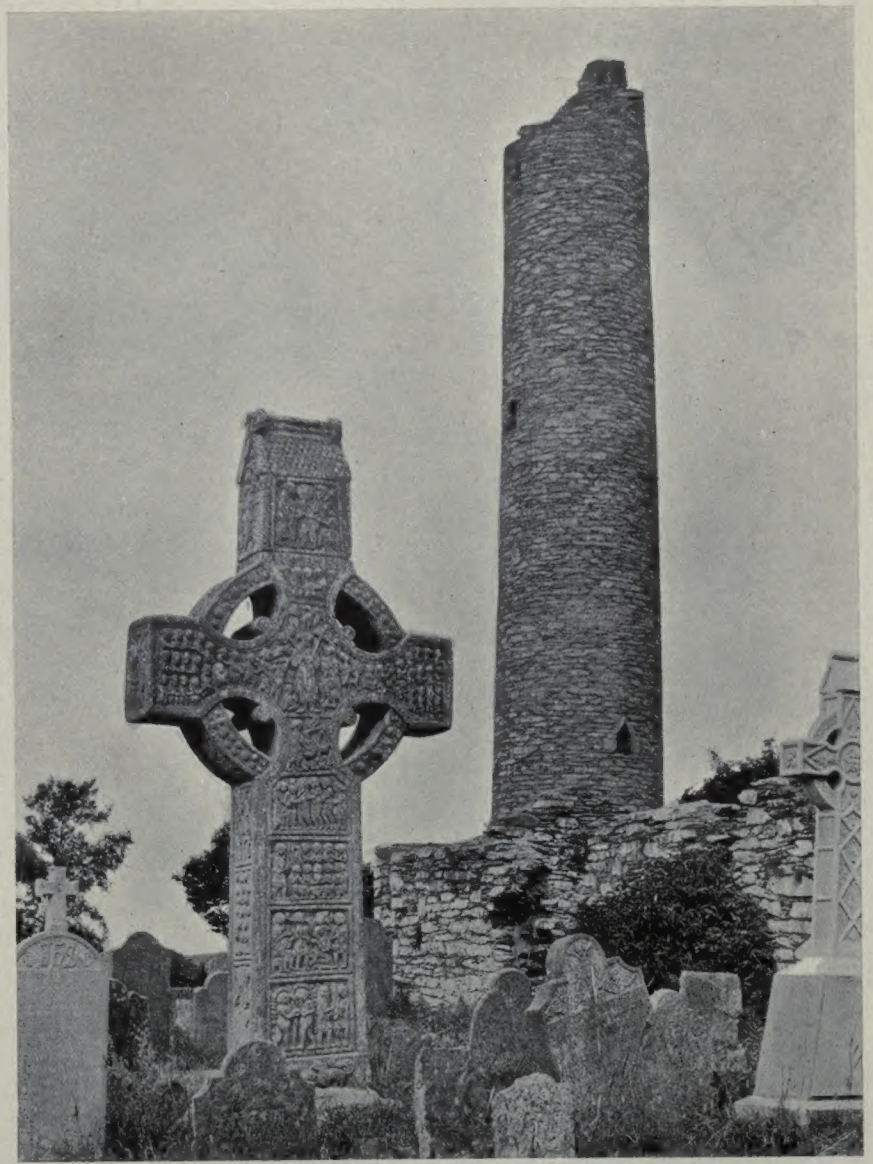


West Face.



East Face.

The Graveyard of Monasterboice and the Cross of Muiredach. (*From photographs by* Mr. R. WELCH.)

MUIREDACH

ABBOT OF MONASTERBOICE 890-923 A.D.

HIS LIFE AND SURROUNDINGS

BY

R. A. S. MACALISTER, M.A., F.S.A.

PROFESSOR OF CELTIC ARCHAEOLOGY, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

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þuhte me þæt ic gesawe : syllicre treow
on lyft lædan : leohte bewunden
beama beorhtost : . . .

Nu ic þe hate : hæleð min se leofa
þæt þu þas gesyhðe : secge mannum
onwreoh wordum : þæt hit is wurdres beam
se ðe ælmihtig God : on þrowode
for mancynnes : manegum synnum
and Adomes : eald-gewyrhtum

PREFACE

THE Lectures contained in the following pages were delivered at Alexandra College, Dublin, in 1913, under the foundation in memory of Margaret Stokes. They are printed as delivered (except for a few additions, omissions, and modifications) at the request of friends who were kind enough to express a desire to see them in permanent form. No exhaustive treatment of the subject is attempted : the lectures profess to be nothing more than three brief hours' discourse, and are designed to stimulate interest rather than to satisfy it.

I have to express my acknowledgments to the Royal Society of Antiquaries ; to Mr. R. Welch, Belfast ; to Count Plunkett ; to Mr. A. M'Googan ; and to Mr. H. S. Crawford, for permitting me to use blocks and photographs belonging to them. The source of each illustration is acknowledged in the letterpress underneath it.

R. A. S. M.

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MUIREDACH

I

MUIREDACH'S EUROPE

PROBABLY all of us have stood at some time by an ancient monument, or in an ancient building, where some historic event was transacted or where some famous man once stood and spoke ; and have indulged in the vain wish that the blind and deaf stone could have seen and heard, and that though dumb it could somehow find a tongue to tell us, as only an eye-witness could, what took place on that great day. Even the fullest written records are so unsatisfying : the bald abstract of the speech reads so cold on the printed page. Our best historians can give us no more than an outline, and we long to add the background, the lights and the shadows, the finishing touches.

But the age of miracles is over, and the dangerous art of magic is denied us. We have, however, been endowed with a gift which, if less satisfying, is at least less perilous. With our imaginations we can fit a tongue to the stone, and with our imaginations we can hear its story, even though our bodily ears may be deaf to its message. And in this way let us try to hear what one of the most beautiful monuments in Ireland—the Cross of Muiredach at Monasterboice—could tell us of the time when, fresh and polished from the sculptor's chisel, and, it may be, bravely painted as well, it was first set up where it stands to-day.

Picture a small cemetery, ragged and unkempt.[1] In the middle are the decaying remains of two small churches. At one side rises the Round Tower, even yet, though it has lost its top, one of the tallest in Ireland, being about 100 feet high. In a remote corner of the graveyard lies a slab with an Irish inscription to the memory of one Ruarcán : and amid the

[1] See the frontispiece.

forest of modern monuments, some of them strangely tasteless and unsightly, rises this cross with two others, one of them much broken. That is all that time has left us of one of the most ancient Christian foundations in the country.

Now let us stand in imagination beside the Cross which is the chief ornament of this lonely spot, and, as the great Saxon poet Cynewulf heard the Holy Rood tell its story, as he has recorded for us in one of the most beautiful poems in existence, let us endeavour to hear the Cross of Muiredach recount something of its humbler memories. We are transported back to the first day of its erection, just about a thousand years ago,

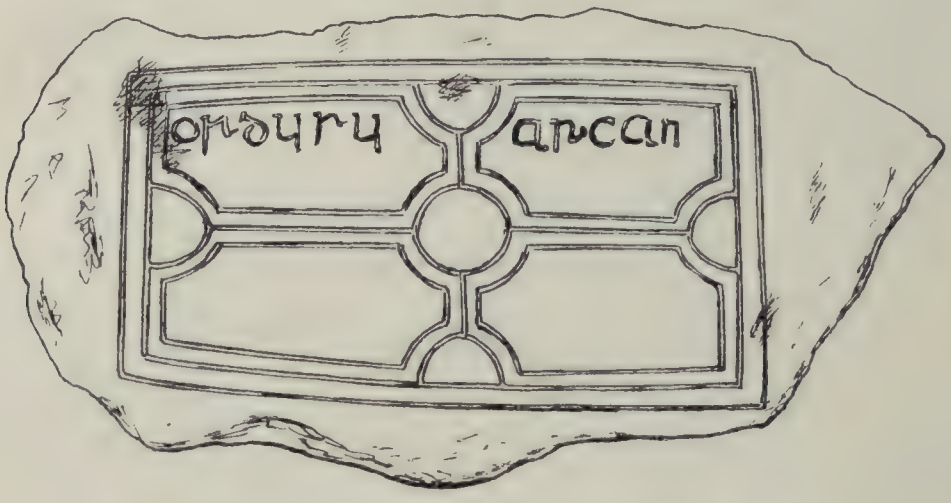


FIG. 1.—The Slab of Ruarcán. (*From a drawing by the author.*)

and beside us stands the Abbot at whose charges it was set up, and whose name it is destined to commemorate through the coming centuries.

What is known of his life can be told in a sentence. His name was Muiredach, son of Domhnall. He became Abbot of Monasterboice in the year 890, and ruled it for thirty-three years, so that when he died he was probably of a fairly advanced age. Beside the important office which he held in Monasterboice, he was tanist-abbot of Armagh, High Steward of the Southern O'Neills, and, according to the *Annals of Ulster*, the " head of counsel of all the men of Bregia." He must thus have led a busy life, though the notices of him in the Annals are so short and unsatisfying. He died 26 November A.D. 923 ; so that if we suppose the Cross to have been

erected about A.D. 913[1]—some ten years, roughly speaking, before his death—we cannot be very far wrong. In any case, right or wrong, let us make the assumption that, as we stand beside the Abbot in front of the Cross that he has caused to be erected, the earth is passing through the year of grace 913.

Our scheme will be to see, first, what the Cross could tell us about Europe, its condition and especially its influence upon Ireland, at the time of its erection : in fact, what it might have overheard if a conversation turning on foreign affairs had taken place beside it. Next we will try and imagine the monument speaking of life and manners in Ireland itself ; and finally we will interrogate it as to the life that passed around it in the monastery, of which the scattered fragments above enumerated are all that are left. Of course nothing like completeness of treatment can be pretended : we can pluck only a few flowers from the garland of interest wound around this ancient monument.

Probably it will be a gloomy day as we stand beside the Abbot in front of the Cross. Our Annals specially record for us that A.D. 913 was " a dark and rainy year." The year before, Halley's Comet had paid the earth its periodic visitation, but it seems to have been " off colour " (if the expressive colloquialism be allowed), much as when it disappointed ourselves on its last return. Usually Halley's Comet made an impression on literature whenever it appeared ; but on its appearance in A.D. 912 it escaped notice altogether, except in a Byzantine Chronicle and in our own *Annals of Ulster*. It may be, however, that the badness of the season was ascribed to that ill-omened visitor.

Let us now cast a glance over Europe, and see something of its political condition at the time of the setting-up of the Cross. It is of course impossible, as well as undesirable, to give more than the broadest outlines, or to go into details that would have scarcely any bearing on the subject.

The Saxon Edward I, or Edward the Elder, was King of England, and was at the time engaged in the task of subduing the Danish settlers on the East Coast. Wales was soon to enjoy the rule of her great lawgiver Howel the Good. Scotland was divided between the Celtic Scots in the West, and that mysterious people the pre-Celtic Picts in the East ; while the

[1] This date was chosen as being an even 1000 years before the date of these lectures.

islands—Shetlands, Orkneys, Hebrides, and the Isle of Man—were in the hands of the still pagan Vikings. An Irish poet-historian once called Ireland *aras na n-iorghal*, " the house of contentions " ; but the name could be applied with equal fitness to the larger island, where Saxons, Danes, Welsh, Scots, Picts, and Norsemen were brought into contact with one another. And the like elements of disturbance will be found if we cross to the European mainland.

FIG. 2.—Map of Europe in 913 A.D.

Just a hundred years before—to be exact, in 814—the great Teutonic King Charlemagne had died. His reign forms one of the most important epochs in European history : his empire extended over what we now call France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, and Northern Italy. As has so often been the fate of great kings, his descendants were wholly unworthy of him, and quite incapable of keeping together the gigantic empire of their great ancestor. It split up into a number of subdivisions,

and, during the hundred years that elapsed between the death of Charlemagne and the erection of our Cross, Europe had witnessed the deplorable family history of the degenerate Carolingian dynasties. From this break-up of the empire of Charlemagne were born the chief nations of modern Europe.

In France, the duchy of Brittany alone had remained outside Charlemagne's empire. Not till the twelfth century did this sturdy little province finally consent to lose its individuality in the rest of France, even though for a time, a little later than our Cross, it was subdued by the overwhelming might of the Northmen. King Charles, surnamed the Simple, had succeeded in 898 to the throne of France. In those troubled times the weakness that earned him his contemptuous nickname was his safeguard; an energetic man would have aroused jealousies and oppositions, and probably brought on wars. In 911, just two years before our critical date, he had made a virtue of necessity and ceded the rich province of Normandy to the Vikings, who were the scourge and terror of France no less than of Ireland. From the monasteries of Northern France there went up the petition added to the Litany—*A furore Normanniorum libera nos, Domine.*

To Hrolfr then, lord of the Vikings settled on the Seine, Charles sent the Archbishop of Rouen, offering him the hand of the King's daughter and the hereditary lordship of Normandy, on condition that Hrolfr should acknowledge Charles as his lord, live at peace with the kingdom, and embrace Christianity. To these terms Hrolfr agreed, adding a further stipulation that he might, if he could, conquer Brittany. Charles made no difficulty in giving what was not his to give, and so the bargain was concluded. It is an oft-told tale how Hrolfr drew the line at kissing the royal foot when he swore fealty to Charles, and commissioned one of his lieutenants to carry out this humiliating part of the ceremony; and how even the deputy himself, being too proud to kneel, tried to lift the King's foot to his lips, with the result that he upset the balance of the Majesty of France.

Normandy, under the rule of Hrolfr, soon settled down into a well-ordered state, and in not more than twenty years' time was far ahead of the rest of France in civilisation, in literature, and in manners. A century and a half later, from this province and from the blood of its new masters,

there came Duke William, surnamed the Conqueror, who changed the course of history in England.

Spain was now beginning the third century of her long subjection to the Muslims. From 711, when the Moors had overrun the ancient Gothic kingdom, Spain was in the grip of the followers of Muhammad, who maintained their sovereignty for over seven hundred years. The many traces which this domination has left in local folklore and in place-names offer some of the most striking illustrations available of the value of the critical study of those subjects. Mysterious works of antiquity are by the Spanish peasants ascribed to the Moors, as such remains are attributed to the Danes by our own country-people ; and if every record of the Arab dominion of Spain had been blotted out, the fact at least could be recovered from the place-names ; many of the most important of these are easily recognisable Arabic words.

The ruler of the Muslims of Spain at the time was Abd er-Rahman III, surnamed the Great, who was destined to enjoy a long and glorious reign of nearly fifty years, which he was only just beginning. He proved, indeed, one of the greatest of all oriental rulers. Only in the north of Spain was the incubus of Muhammadanism absent. The province of Asturias remained unconquered : to this day the popular speech of that province is free from the Moorish idioms that can be detected in the colloquial language of other parts of the peninsula. At the moment of history with which we are concerned, Alphonso III, the great King of Asturias, had just died, and, like France and Germany after the death of Charlemagne, the Christian part of Spain was distracted by the squabbles of his sons.

Italy, too, was in a deplorable condition at the time. During the century before it had been harassed by the Saracens in the south, who still held Sicily and part of the mainland ; and to this were added the inroads of Magyár barbarians and Greek invaders in the north, domestic intrigues and jealousies at Rome, and from time to time pillagings from the ubiquitous Vikings. It is utterly impossible to compress into a few words the bewildering complexities of Italian history and politics at the end of the ninth and beginning of the tenth century : those interested must be left to follow out the subject for themselves. The Pope was Anastasius III, who died in the year 913, and of whom very little is known.

The rise of feudalism had virtually divided Germany into a large number of petty duchies, which we cannot stop even to enumerate. The King Louis was a child ; and any central government that there may have been was in the hands of his regents, chief of whom was Hatto, Archbishop of Mainz. He died in the year that we are assuming for the erection of the Cross, just a thousand years ago. Popular tradition preserved a lurid memory of this prelate, as of the other Hatto who was archbishop of the same province later in the same century. The first Hatto, it was said, was cast by the devil into the crater of Mt. Etna, on account of his enormous crimes. Everyone knows the gruesome Rhineland story of the fate of the second Hatto, in the Tower of the Rats.

The history of Poland, and indeed of the various tribes that fill the great area of Russia, had hardly begun in A.D. 913. They were still almost wholly pagan. In any case we can hardly suppose that any knowledge of them other than vague hearsay had reached Ireland, so it is not necessary for us to occupy time with them.

Just seven years before the date we have assumed for the erection of the Cross, an event of the greatest importance for the subsequent history of Central Europe had taken place. As though the Vikings and the Saracens were not misery enough for the Continent, another barbarous horde had burst into the middle of the Continent from the East, and became the scourge of inland Europe as the Vikings were the terror of the coast lands. These were the Magyárs, the founders of the interesting kingdom of Hungary. They drove like a wedge right through the mass of the Slavonic population of Eastern Europe. In the disorders of the time, one petty duke would call in their aid against another, with consequences disastrous to his whole country—just as, according to the legend of our school history books, Vortigern called in the aid of the Saxons and thus lost England. The dukes attacked, in their turn, adopted the fatal policy of buying the barbarians off, which of course only brought them back again a year or two later, hungry for more plunder. We can hardly doubt that echoes of these storms, raging at the very moment when our Cross was erected, penetrated even to peaceful Monasterboice.

This event altered the map of Europe for all the future. For these intruders, among the few people in the Continent speaking a language not

belonging to the Indo-European family, sundered the Slavs of the North from the South, and those of the East from the West. Thus those of the North and West, cut off from their brethren, lost their independence, and became entirely Teutonised in religion and in language.

We now come to what was still the greatest power in Europe, and had remained so from the beginning, except during the brilliant reign of Charlemagne. The heirs of the Roman Empire were still established in Constantinople: Constantinople was still the chief city of Europe, and indeed in the world. In the Icelandic sagas the name for Constantinople is *Miklagarðr*, "the big court," *par excellence:* thus the supremacy of Constantinople was acknowledged even in the most remote island of Europe. In civilisation and in commerce it was the heir of the great and still unforgotten days of Rome; and the empire of Constantinople was the barrier which saved Europe from the inroads of the uncivilised tribes of Asia Minor, who otherwise would certainly have disputed with the Magyárs, the Vikings, and the Saracens for a share in the spoil.

Just at the moment, this great empire had fallen into the hands of a child of seven years, Constantine VII, surnamed Porphyrogenitus. His father, who had just died, had been a man of letters rather than of action, and had spent his time writing treatises on theology and on the art of war. Constantine proved in time to be of the same kind. His kingdom was guided for him during his minority by regents, and he quietly allowed them to manage his affairs till he was forty years of age, while he amused himself by writing a treatise "On the Administration of Empire" and another "On the Ceremonies and Etiquette of a Court," which display much curious and painstaking research. When he was forty his regent died, and the sons of the latter proclaimed themselves emperors. An outburst of popular indignation compelled the dilettante Emperor to come out of his study, and to awake to the duties and responsibilities of his birth. But these events are still more than thirty years away in the future, as we stand beside the Abbot in front of his newly erected Cross.

Just as all English literature, not much more than a hundred years ago, is obsessed by the spectre of Napoleon and the prospects of his invading England, so all Irish literature of a thousand years ago, so far as it reflects

contemporary feeling at all, is obsessed by the spectre of the Northmen. The Vikings or " men of the bays " (for that is the meaning of the name) were *the* foreigners at the time, and, as they were the Europeans who for better or worse had the greatest influence on Ireland when the Cross was erected, a few words as to who these people really were will be necessary to complete this part of the subject.

If anyone be asked casually " Who were the Vikings ? " he will probably answer " hordes of savage heathen sea-pirates from Scandinavia, who plundered everything they could lay hands on in the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries A.D." That is the truth, but it is very far from being the whole truth. Savage they undoubtedly were, and likewise pirates. They were, moreover, heathen. But we must not overlook the other side of the picture. Intrepid sailors, they made their way over the stormy North Sea, and discovered Iceland about 850—though, to be sure, they found a colony of Irish monks there before them. Thence in time they made their way to Greenland, and thence to " Vineland the Good," apparently N.E. America. Along the northern coasts of France they travelled, and there, as we have seen, they forced the King to give them one of his best provinces : round by the west of Spain, whose Arab chronicles speak of them as the *Aulād Majūj*—" Sons of Magog " ; on through the Straits of Gibraltar, and as far as Greece. In Venice there stands a stone lion formerly in the Piræus by Athens, which bears an inscription in Runes, cut on it by some wandering sea-rover. This bold faring across the open ocean was a very different matter from the nervous shore-hugging expeditions of those much over-rated people the Phœnicians, their predecessors in active maritime enterprise.

Not only were they thus bold explorers ; they were gifted with exuberant imaginations. Their rich and impressive mythology and their splendid literature testify thereto. In art they had come under influences similar to those which moulded the arts of the Celtic peoples, and they developed what they learned to so high a pitch that they rivalled even the artists of Early Christian Ireland. Indeed the Scandinavian influence on the later works of Celtic art, such as the Cross of Cong or the Psalter of Ricemarch, is almost revolutionary : the way in which the abstract interlacements of the native Celtic school give place to dragons of various kinds

is undoubtedly due to the play of Scandinavian art-motives upon those practised by the Irish craftsmen.

In short, the Vikings were a strange mixture of civilisation and barbarism. When we glance, if ever so casually, at the literature they have left us, we do not wonder at the terror their name inspired in Ireland. Horrors reminding one of Benin or Dahomey more than anything else are recorded of them—indeed are recorded with glee by themselves ; yet they had certainly attained to a high standard of civilisation if estimated by the works of art they have left behind—some of which, from the Island Bridge Cemetery, may be seen in the Royal Irish Academy's collection in the National Museum in Dublin.

Such then, in outline, was the setting of the world of Muiredach—on the whole an evil and a depressing world, full of envy, hatred, and malice : not merely in its meteorology was the year dark and gloomy !

Notwithstanding the disorders of which some indication has now been given, there was no little intercourse between the nations. Religious pilgrimages to Rome or to the Holy Places of Palestine were frequent, and every traveller that went on these perilous journeys brought back with him a narrative of observations and experiences that gave him material for conversation for the rest of his life. Commercial and military operations also served to bring men from place to place, and so to spread the knowledge of foreign lands and their ways. In all this intercourse Ireland had its share, and profited both materially and intellectually therefrom. Scholars, like Erigena at the French court in the preceding century, and missionaries like those who carried the light to Germany, France, and the Apennines, must also have been instrumental in bringing back knowledge of foreign lands to Ireland ; and men who came for study to the Irish Schools from abroad must have left behind, in return for the learning they acquired, a fuller knowledge of whatever language, manners, or customs were native to themselves.

So it is not unlikely that the Abbot has a fair knowledge of the details of the various countries over which we have been travelling in thought. To some extent, however, the question of his acquaintance with European geography is put beyond the region of speculation by a remarkable map

to be found in a Manuscript[1] now in the British Museum—a map drawn in England and for an Anglo-Saxon, but, it has been supposed, by an Irish artist. However that may be, it probably gives us a good idea of the state of geographical knowledge in Ireland during the tenth century (p. 13).

It will be seen that, unlike our maps, it has the East, not the North, in the top ; so that Ireland appears in the lower left-hand corner. Armagh is the only place in Ireland which is marked. To the North is Iceland, to the East Britannia, with a firework of islands in which the Hebrides and the Orkneys are combined. In the centre of these appears to be Iona. The Continent is cut through the middle by the Mediterranean, with the Straits of Gibraltar or Pillars of Hercules represented as actual columns at its mouth ; the Adriatic is recognisable, cutting off Italy, which, though it has lost its familiar boot-like shape, is made unmistakable by having Rome conspicuously marked. It would be hard to name the islands that the artist has liberally peppered over the Mediterranean Sea ; but Sicily is easily recognisable by the three-cornered shape that gave it its old name Trinacria. The large island like a starfish at the mouth of the sea is probably Sardinia. Working away to the North are the Sea of Marmora and the Black Sea, their connecting straits being greatly widened ; but Constantinople clearly identifies this part of the world. On the other side is the Nile, with Alexandria at its mouth. Farther East is the Holy Land, divided among the tribes. One sees Mount Ararat, with Noah's ark on its top ; Babylon, Mount Sinai, and at the extreme top (East) the island of Taprobane or Ceylon. In the right-hand top corner is an inscription which says, " here they say there is a burning mountain " ; in the left-hand top corner is a sketch of a wild beast with the inscription, " here lions are abundant."

That this map, the date of which is some sixty or eighty years later than our Cross, represents very fairly the geographical notions current at one time in Ireland is shown by a very interesting fact. When descriptions of itineraries are given, it is possible to lay them down on this map. Thus in the *Leabhar Gabhála*, or " Book of Invasions of Ireland," one of the most curious features is the strange succession of wanderings backward and forward which the various tribes are supposed to have passed

[1] Class-marked *Tiberius B. V.*

through before finally finding a home in Ireland. On an ordinary map these are unintelligible ; they zigzag over the countries like a knight over a chessboard, without rhyme or reason. On *this* map they are more or less straight lines. Many things in these tales of wanderings are explained at once. We are told that Ireland was discovered by a man who saw it from the top of a tower " in Brigantia in Spain " ; a wild enough story until you see a map in which the northern point of Spain is called Brigantia, and is brought so near to Ireland that the distance between them is actually less than the width of the Straits of Gibraltar. No one would now think of calling Spain " three-cornered "—a stock epithet of Spain in tenth century Irish poems. On this map it is drawn three-cornered. No one would now tell a story of a person who sailed over the Caspian Sea, of all places, to Ireland ; but if the world were as this map shows it, the Caspian Sea would open into the Northern Ocean, and thus there is an open waterway for the whole journey. The metrical treatise on geography in the Book of Leinster (see *Proc. Royal Irish Acad.* 1883), probably written originally some time in the tenth century, gives on the whole a very favourable idea of the geographical knowledge current at the time in Ireland.

The history and antiquities of Ireland cannot be studied with profit as a subject apart. They must be considered in their setting and in their relation to contemporary Europe. In the constant give-and-take of knowledge, art and civilisation must have received stimuli from without, in all countries ; and Ireland is no exception. Even a sculptured cross in an inland cemetery in our remote island is not a mere parochial monument ; it is a fragment of European history, and should be treated as such.

FIG. 3.—Panel [13]. (*From a drawing by the author.*)

A Tenth Century Map of the World. (*From a photograph by* Mr. D. MACBETH.)

II

MUIREDACH'S IRELAND

TURNING now our eyes from Europe at large, let us concentrate our attention on the Ireland of the end of the ninth and beginning of the tenth century, in which Muiredach found himself. He succeeded to the Abbacy of Monasterboice in A.D. 890, and ruled it till 923, with a margin of possible error of a year or two in each date.

When we wish to know what was going on in Ireland at any time, it is natural to turn up one of the great collections of Annals, in which the historians recorded current events—such as the *Annals of Ulster* (by far the best and most trustworthy) or the *Annals of the Four Masters*. If we turn to the *Annals of Ulster* for the year 913, we will find a long entry, recording such events as these :

"Flann son of Mael-Sechnaill devastated the region of Bregia,[1] and violated several churches.

"The King of Ui Conaill was killed by the Ui Echach.

"Niall son of Aedh led a hosting into Dal nAraide,[2] and in several battles routed the defenders of the district.

"A naval battle at the Isle of Man, and a large new fleet of Vikings appeared in Waterford Harbour.

"Niall son of Aedh led a second hosting into the North of Ireland, and forty-five men were killed."

The record of any year would be similar to this. Battles, murders, and slaughters of one kind and another are the most conspicuous entries throughout the Irish Annals. There seems indeed at first sight ample justification for the lurid picture of life in ancient Ireland which a certain

[1] The district between the Boyne and the Liffey. [2] South of Antrim and Down.

class of writers love to depict. They infer from compilations such as these that Ireland was a kind of bear-garden, the inhabitants of which spent their whole time killing each other.

This way of looking at these records is, however, not merely unfair ; it is unscientific, which is worse. There is a real analogy between the ancient Irish Annals and the modern newspapers. Both record events not because they are normal, but because they are extraordinary. Suppose a man going from Dublin to Dalkey were set upon by highway robbers and killed ; the newspapers next day would be full of the details. But now let us make the wild supposition that there was a ferocious gang on the Dalkey road who as a matter of course killed everyone that passed ; then we would have in the newspapers the report of the brilliant achievement of escaping the danger and reaching Dalkey in safety. Thus, if in reading a file of old newspapers you were to find one or other of these reports, you would infer that in each case the event was abnormal. It follows that the Annals of Ireland are full of tales of bloodshed not because there was so much of it, but because there was, on the whole, so little. Scoffers at the uncertainty of life in ancient Ireland may be reminded that even now, after a thousand more years of Christianity, a list of horrors quite as long and as deplorable could be compiled in the course of a month from any daily newspaper ; yet most of us go through life without being at all personally affected by such events. And we must also remember before passing verdict and sentence on the old world of Ireland that there were many extenuating circumstances : the organisation of the inhabitants into a congeries of loosely-knit clans, with many excuses for mutual jealousies —the few outlets that there were at the time for natural and legitimate ambition—the fact that not only in Ireland, but everywhere else, fighting was still the business of every self-respecting man not devoted directly to the service of the Church—the fact that a foreign foe had already established himself in Dublin, so that, even if the people wished, they simply could not devote themselves to the arts of peace. We must also remember that many of the events grandiloquently described as " hostings " and " slaughters " were what in our less romantic days we should describe as cattle-drives and faction-fights.

We need not therefore trouble ourselves further to pity the Abbot for

living in a bear-garden, for though it was by no means a golden age, it was not nearly so bad as some people love to make out.

It was an age of simple faith. Science was not yet born, and signs and wonders were a matter of course. There was no lack of these in our Abbot's time. Six years before his election to the abbatial chair, there was a total eclipse of the sun, and the stars were seen by daytime in the heavens. As if that were not enough for one year, a child was born somewhere near Clonmacnois who distinguished himself by speaking two months after his birth. This made a great impression at the time : we run up against this child every now and then, when we follow up any moderately extensive course of reading in Irish literature. It is a little disappointing to find, when we compare the various references to him that have been preserved, that the oracular utterances with which he is sometimes credited shrink down to a mere invocation of the divine name ; to utter a sound that imaginative bystanders will take for " a Dhé " does not seem a very difficult feat even for a baby of two months. However, it was quite enough to cause talk, and the various references to this precocious infant show that there was talk in plenty. On the strength of his achievement he earned a place in the standard list of the wonders of Ireland.

On the 1st of January 889, the year before the Abbot's election, there was a display of the Aurora Borealis—so we are to understand the statement of the Annals that " the sky seemed to be on fire "—an admirable description of that beautiful phenomenon. And strange news came from Scotland in the following year—and I can picture some traveller in the guest-house of the monastery telling the tale amid awe-struck questionings as to what this should portend—how a woman had been cast up by the sea on the shore, as white as a swan, 195 feet long, with hair 17 feet long, and with nose and fingers 7 feet long. I suppose it was a seal or a whale to begin with, and I daresay the story did not lose in crossing from Scotland to Ireland. No doubt the Abbot was worried in 897 about a " shower of blood " which took place in the district round Monasterboice in that year, and about a parhelion that was seen on the 6th May 910, when, as the Annals say, " two suns ran together on that day." In the following year, as I have already mentioned, Halley's Comet appeared and was noticed in Ireland ; and in 916 there was " great snow and cold, and frost unpre-

cedented, so that the chief lakes and rivers of Ireland were passable, which brought great havoc upon cattle, birds, and fishes. There were horrid signs besides : the heavens seemed to glow with comets. A mass of fire was seen, with thunder, passing over Ireland from the west, which went out to sea eastwards." The last, I suppose, was some kind of fireball or exploding meteor ; but in an age when the motions of the heavenly bodies were interpreted as portents of coming disaster, such events as these must have caused alarm to an extent which we find it impossible to realise.

Was life then nothing but an alternation of wars and slaughters and murders and appalling portents ? I think the Cross of Muiredach can answer that question. I think the mere fact that it exists, that it shows a high development of art, is sufficient proof that there was a measure of quietness in the country, notwithstanding the stormy records of the Annals. A human bear-garden could not possibly have developed the artistic taste and skill which this Cross and the other works of art of its period display. A work of art such as this is the crown of the quiet patient industry of generations of craftsmen, and they simply could not have existed in the cut-throat community which ancient Ireland is by some supposed to have been.

These words of introduction were necessary to supply a setting, so to speak, for what we are to say in this section about Ireland a thousand years ago. In the rest of the chapter it will be best to confine ourselves to what the Cross itself can tell us—calling in any evidence that may be available in other monuments to help out its testimony, but not to go outside the special subjects on which we can make the Cross speak to us. This being so, I think we can get the Cross to tell us something about its own maker, and about houses, costume, weapons and implements, music, science, and art in ancient Ireland.

I. First then, about the *maker of the Cross*. I do not for a moment suppose that this was the Abbot himself. He would no doubt commission a professional sculptor to carry out the work under his superintendence —it being understood that the expression " professional sculptor " may mean, and probably here does mean, one actually an inmate of a monastery, whose special talents lay in that direction. There probably were not many stone-cutters in the country competent to carry out such a monument as

The Cross of Durrow. (*By permission of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.*)

this, and we may therefore expect to be able to trace his hand in other crosses of the same kind elsewhere.

Take for example the Cross at Durrow, King's Co. (Plate II). There are many details in the ornament and the choice and treatment of the subjects which show practical identity in the two monuments. There is one important *difference :* the little roll in the angles of the cross is attached to the ring, not to the body of the cross as at Monasterboice. But, on the other hand, the peculiar ornament of two twisted snakes with heads between each coil, on the outer surface of the ring, appears in both ; as does also the house-roof treatment of the top with imitation of shingles. The treatment of the main figure-subjects on the two faces of the head of the Cross is practically identical in both, as is the detail of the spiral pattern in the side panel. The Durrow Cross has so many points of resemblance with the Monasterboice Cross, that I feel as certain as it is possible to feel on a question of the kind, in the absence of actual documentary evidence, that the two are to be ascribed to the same hand.

In the taller of the two chief crosses at Monasterboice, again, we may see our artist's hand at work here also. It has many points of resemblance to both the Durrow Cross and to that of Muiredach. This, however, seems to show signs of having been altered at a later date, the head being in a different stone from the shaft, and the two fitting badly together.

At Termon Feichin, Co. Louth (Plate III, B), not far from Monasterboice, is a less pretentious cross, showing, however, some details in the treatment of the interlacements and spiral patterns common with the Monasterboice patterns. At Kells are several crosses, one of which, dedicated to SS. Patrick and Columba (Plate IV, A), is very similar to the Monasterboice Cross. It reproduces the Adam-Eve-Cain-Abel panel, and also the charming panel [29]. The Market Cross at Kells is also possibly a member of the same family, though the resemblance is more remote (Plate IV, C). I suspect, however, that these Kells crosses are direct imitations of Muiredach's, by an inferior artist. The Cross at Castledermot, Co. Kildare, may be ascribed to our artist with greater probability.

These points of resemblance come the more into prominence when

we consider crosses which are certainly *not* by the same hand. The south cross at Clonmacnois, for example, with its elaborate bosses, which subordinates the central scene of the Crucifixion to the geometrical ornament of the stone ; the Drumcliffe Cross (Co. Sligo), with its animal figures in high relief ; the Ahenny Crosses (Co. Tipperary), with their clumsy border frame and comparatively poor interlacing ; the Moone Abbey Cross (Co. Kildare), with its perfectly hideous figure-sculpture and bad proportions (Plate IV, B) ; and of course the late twelfth century crosses at Tuam and Dysert O'Dea, with their flat dragonesque coils taking the place of the pure geometrical patterns of the earlier period—all these present so strong a contrast to the Muiredach family of crosses that they throw the mutual resemblances between the monuments ascribed to that family into yet higher relief.

Thus we have the picture of a sculptor working in what are now the counties of King's Co., Westmeath, Meath, Louth, and perhaps Kildare, summoned from place to place according as he was required to exercise his craft. His headquarters, I suspect, were at Clonmacnois ; for the great Cross of King Flann, which is there to be seen, is another member of the family. The panel representing the soldiers watching the tomb is identical with panels on the taller Monasterboice Cross and on the Durrow Cross ; the twisted snakes, the remarkable panel of the Divine Hand, the equally remarkable panel of interlaced men (which, however, also appears at Ahenny), and the roof-treatment of the top are details which it presents in common with the Muiredach Cross. There is also a strong suggestion of Clonmacnois influence in the treatment of the ring on the tallest of the Monasterboice crosses.

I have elsewhere suggested [1] that the sculptor of the Flann Cross was an inmate of Clonmacnois, by name Turcán, on the strength of an inscription still to be seen among the ruins of that spot. It now appears possible that the labours of that great sculptor extended beyond his own monastery, and that he has bequeathed us many works of art in other places as well.

Another of the series of crosses at Kells (Plate III, A) gives us technical information about the methods of such a sculptor as this. For some reason it was unfinished ; probably the sculptor died, and no one was found

[1] *Memorial Slabs of Clonmacnois*, pp. 109, 110.

A

B

Crosses: A, Kells (unfinished cross); B, Termon Feichin. (*From Photographs by* Mr. R. Welch.)

equal to the task of completing the work. We see from this that the form of the cross was finished first, projecting blocks being left for the future panels. The minute interlacing of the ring was then completed. The central panel of the head was almost completed, lacking only the finishing touches ; in the right arm the figures were blocked out, in the left arm only the first few strokes had been cut. The panels on the shaft had not been begun.

II. The Ahenny Cross has an awkward conical capstone, the purpose

Fig. 4.—Reconstruction of an Irish Timber House.

of which is to shed off the rain and prevent it percolating into the stone. Our artist made a gable-like top to most of his crosses, and this suggested to him the roof of a *house*. He carried out the idea to its logical development, and made the top arm of the Cross the picture of an Irish house of its period.

To understand this, let us first inquire what the outline of a better-class house in ancient Ireland would be like. I have drawn out this diagram (fig. 4) to illustrate what I have to say about it. I have left aside all considerations of internal divisions or furniture, for which there is

available a certain amount of material, and confine my attention to the four walls and the roof. The foundations on which we can base a study of early houses in Ireland are not the remains of the houses themselves (for these have long ago disappeared, having been made of wood and other destructible materials) ; but some descriptions of houses that we have, a number of rules and regulations in the Brehon laws, and, especially, the earliest primitive stone churches, which, as I shall show presently, are imitations in stone of wooden houses.

At the four corners are stout posts, connected at the top by beams. It is these posts which carry the weight of the roof ; the sides between them are filled with a screen, so to speak, of wattling intertwined on smaller posts and covered, at least on the outside, with clay ; which seems to have had a limewash painted over it to make it white. The doorway has oblique jambs ; a curious passage in the Brehon laws gives us a hint of its height, by forbidding anyone under penalty of a fine from carrying a child into a house on his back—for fear of the child knocking its head against the lintel. The roof is very high pitched to shed off rain and snow. Two great beams rise at the gable ends, crossing each other X-wise. The ridge-piece is supported in the fork of the X, and below it is secured the beam that sustains the upper end of the roof rafters. There is a poetical description of a house contained in the ancient document called the *Colloquy of the Elders*. This describes the house as being of the colour of lime, its door lintel being covered with plates of silver, which is a good testimonial to the honesty of the neighbours. On the roof was a thatch of blue and yellow birds' wings. This I need not say is not to be taken literally ; such a roof would not stand our climate for an hour. It is a poetical description of the overlapping of the wooden shingles, which have suggested the appearance of feathers to the writer of the poem ; and his reference to colours indicates that these shingles were painted with some ornamental alternation of hue. The house was 100 feet long and, apparently, 20 feet broad. The cross at the top had apparently an ornamental piece fastened on to each side, masking the ends of the roof-beams. I have left out one of these, in order to show the construction.

When stone churches were first built in this country they followed the model of the wooden houses, in which, no doubt, the first assemblies of

A

B

C

Crosses: A, Kells (SS. Patrick and Columba); B, Moone Abbey: C, Kells (Market-place). (*From Photographs by* Mr. R. WELCH.)

Christian believers had been held; and they display certain details which cannot be explained satisfactorily except as translations into stone of features essential to the wooden buildings (Pl. V). Most notable among these are the rectangular plan; the high-pitched roof; corner pilasters, which reproduce the heavy upright corner beams of the wooden house; the projecting bracket, about the use and symbolism of which many wild conjectures have been made, but which is merely a translation into stone of the projecting ends of the wooden wall-plate. On the wealthier houses these projecting ends were probably decorated with carving or with ornamental

Fig. 5.—A Winged Finial. (*From an example at Iniscaltra drawn by the author.*)

metal plates. And lastly, the winged finial, a peculiar ornamental terminal frequently found on the gables of our earliest stone churches, which is an attempt to represent the crossing tops of the great beams of the gable-end.

When we look at the head of the Cross (see the frontispiece), we see most of these details reproduced. The strong corner-posts, the roof timbers crossing in an ornamental X form, the shingled roof, are all there. The side walls have been turned into panels for the reception of sculpture, but otherwise the head of the Cross is a perfect little model of a house. The winged finial can be best seen in the drawing in fig. 35 below.

It might be called a model of a *church*, but this is only moving the house

original a step further back ; for, as the foregoing paragraphs have shown, the older Irish churches were modelled on the contemporary framed timber houses, in which no doubt the earliest assemblies of Christians were held. It might also be called a model of a *shrine* (like the famous shrine of St. Mainchín, or the fine specimen found in 1891 in Lough Erne, here figured), but to this the same remark applies. For these shrines were made after the model of Solomon's temple, as that structure was conceived of by Irish ecclesiastical artists, and as we find it pictured in the *Book of Kells :* and it is quite evident that the framed house was the source of the con-

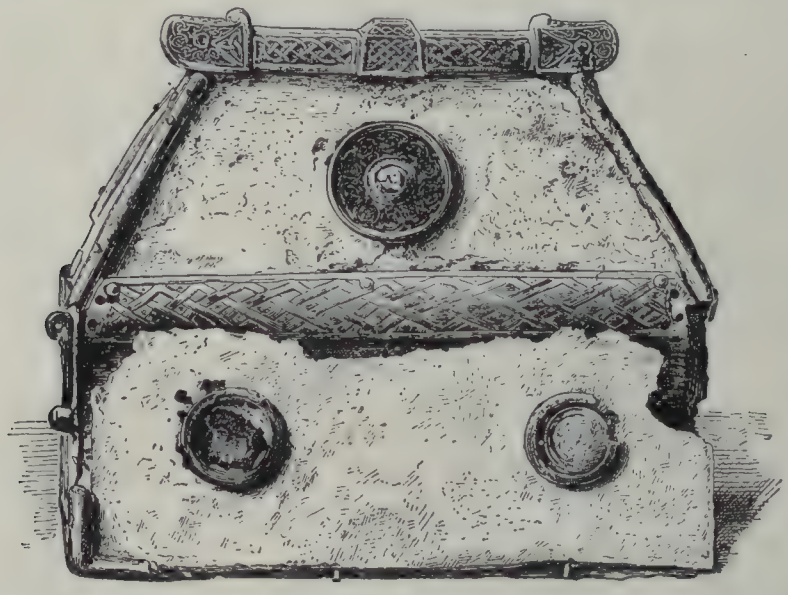


Fig. 6.—Lough Erne Shrine. (*By permission of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.*)

ception. The " winged finial " and the roof of differently shaped and coloured shingles are clearly traceable among the fantasies of the illuminator.

Clearly we could not expect houses like these to last for any length of time. If not destroyed by fire, the natural decay of the wood and subsequent agricultural operations would sweep them out of existence altogether. Any metal ornamentation they may have possessed would be appropriated for later use. And this is one explanation of the total absence of early towns or villages, or even large steadings, among the remains of antiquity in Ireland. Thus, in estimating the culture of Ireland before the coming of the Anglo-Normans, we must not forget that many elements that have

A

B

Church (A) at Kilmalkedar, Co. Kerry, showing the corner pilasters and the winged finial: and (B) the Righ-fheart Church, Glendalough, Co. Wicklow, showing the corner brackets. (*From Photographs by* Mr. R.)

a bearing on the problem have perished by the ordinary processes of decay ; so that if we find that any important necessary of civilisation seems to be absent from the relics left behind, we cannot always justly infer that it was quite unknown at the time.

III. I said further that the Cross gives us information about the *costume* of its time. There are in all 124 figures sculptured in its various panels ; all of which, with five exceptions, are shown in some form of costume. Just as the artist of the *Book of Kells* represented Solomon's temple like a contemporary house, so the artist of our Cross, and of all such works

Fig. 7.—Solomon's Temple, from *Book of Kells.*
(*By permission of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.*)

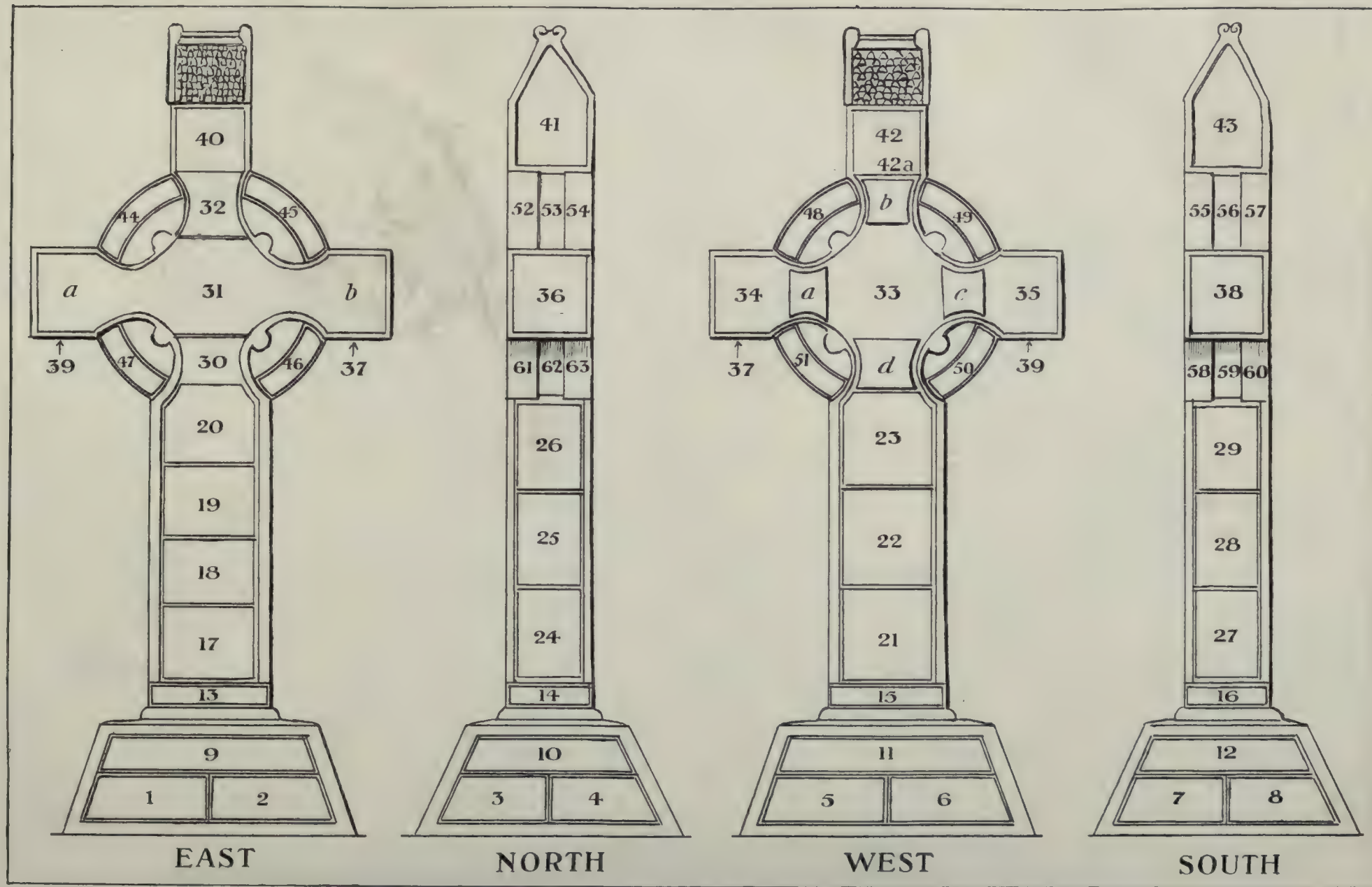
of early Christian art, represented the persons with whom he was concerned in the costume of his contemporaries. This was the ordinary convention. In mediaeval frescoes, stained glass, or miniatures you will find regularly that the same convention is followed. There are countless pictures representing the Madonna as an Italian or a Dutch maiden, according to the nationality of the artist ; one often sees paintings of the Holy Family with a distant view in the background showing a village from which rises the spire of a church. Even we ourselves, in our pictures of the patriarchs, represent Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as modern Muhammadans. So,

instead of casting the stone of scorn at the sculptor of the Monasterboice Cross for his anachronisms in the draping of his figures, let us be grateful for the valuable information as to costume that he has preserved. For obviously we can hope to gain even less information about ancient costume from actual specimens than about ancient houses. A few tattered rags have been found from time to time in bogs, and something about the texture of the garments can be learned from them ; but for their cut and the way in which they were worn we must look to monuments like these.

We gather from literary allusions, as well as from monuments such as this, that different ranks of the community had different types of costume—the difference lying both in cut and in colour. One of the early legendary kings of the country was fabled to have introduced a law to the effect that the seven ranks of the community should be distinguished by the number of colours in their attire—slaves to have only one colour, and so on up to kings and queens, who were to be resplendent in rainbow-like garments of seven colours. The king may or may not be mythical, but there is probably a basis in fact for the law he was said to have promulgated.

Of the 119 draped figures on the Cross, a large number are too small, or too indefinitely carved, to make them instructive. There is, however, a sufficient number of outstanding figures, in which the costume is carefully indicated, to tell us a good deal on the subject ; and probably even if the less carefully executed figures were finished with the exactness of these more important examples, they would not add very much information, but would simply repeat the testimony of the others. The first thing that strikes us is that, with one exception, all the figures are bareheaded. That one exception is Goliath [18],[1] who has a conical helmet. We therefore gain no information about headgear from our Cross, but this is not surprising, for there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the hatless league would have been quite at home in ancient Ireland !

[1] Numbers in square brackets throughout indicate the panels as numbered in Plate VI and in the accompanying key, where references to illustrations in this book will also be found.



Key to the Panels on the Cross.

A LIST OF THE PANELS ON THE CROSS WITH REFERENCE TO THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF THEM IN THIS BOOK.

Base

1. (Defaced)
2. Interlacement (Plate VII)
3. Key-pattern (Fig. 18)
4. Interlacement (Plate VII)
5. Key-pattern (Fig. 18)
6. Interlacement (Plate VII)
7. (Defaced)
8. (Defaced)
9. Zodiac, &c. (Fig. 24)
10. do. (Fig. 24)
11. do. (Fig. 24)
12. do. (Fig. 24)

Shaft

13. Two animals playing (Fig. 3)
14. Two dwarfs (Fig. 21)
15. Two cats and inscription (Fig. 22)
16. Two animals (Fig. 37)
17. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel (Fig. 25)
18. David and Goliath (Fig. 25)
19. Moses striking the Rock (Fig. 26)
20. Adoration of the Magi (Fig. 26)
21. Christ seized by soldiers (Fig. 27)
22. Incredulity of Thomas (?) (Fig. 27)
23. Commission to the Apostles (Fig. 28)
24. Interlacement (Plate VII)
25. do. (Plate VII)
26. do. (Plate VII)
27. do. of human figures (Figs. 16, 17)
28. Spiral pattern (Figs. 14, 15)
29. Vine pattern with animals (Fig. 19)

Head

30. Michael weighing the Souls (Fig. 29)
31. The Last Judgment (Fig. 29)
31*a*. The Blessed (Fig. 29)
31*b*. The Lost (Fig. 29)
32. The Recording Angel (?) (Fig. 29)
33. The Crucifixion (Fig. 28)
33*a*. Spiral pattern (Figs. 14, 28)
33*b*. Interlaced snakes (Plate VII, Fig. 28)
33*c*. Spiral pattern (Figs. 14, 28)
33*d*. Interlaced snakes (Plate VII, Fig. 28)
34. Soldiers (Fig. 28)
35. The Resurrection (?) (Fig. 28)
36. (Unexplained) (Fig. 32)
37. The Divine Hand (Fig. 30)
38. Pilate washing his hands (Fig. 31)
39. Two animals (Fig. 20)

Top

40. Paul and Antony breaking bread (Fig. 36)
41. Paul and Antony meeting (Fig. 35)
42. Moses, Aaron, and Hur (Figs. 28, 33)
42*a*. Two birds (Plate VII)
43. A Horseman (Fig. 34)

Ring

44. Spiral pattern (Figs. 14, 29)
45. do. (Figs. 14, 29)
46. do. (Figs. 14, 29)
47. do. (Figs. 14, 29)
48. Interlacement (Plate VII, Fig. 28)
49. do. (Plate VII, Fig. 28)
50. do. (identical with 48)
51. do. (identical with 49)
52. do. (Plate VII)
53. Key-pattern (Fig. 18)
54. Interlacement (Plate VII)
55. do. (Plate VII)
56. do. (Plate VII)
57. do. (Plate VII)
58. do. (Plate VII, Fig. 20)
59. Interlaced snakes with heads in the coils (Fig. 20)
60. Interlacement (Plate VII, Fig. 20)
61. Key-pattern (Figs. 18, 30)
62. Similar to 59 (Fig. 30)
63. Key-pattern (Figs. 18, 30)

In some of our ancient tales there are descriptions of the attire of the principal persons, which it is very instructive to compare with the sculptured figures. Here, for instance, is one from the old story called the *Wooing of Ferb*, in the Book of Leinster. " There were fifty white-faced slender youths in those fifty chariots ; and there was not one of them but was the son of a king and a queen and a hero and a warrior of Connacht. Fifty purple robes were on them, with hems garnished with gold and silver. A brooch of red-gold, refined in the fire, in every robe. A

FIG. 8.—Panels from the broken Cross at Kells. (*From a Photo by* Mr. H. S. CRAWFORD.)

filmy silken smock, with loop-fastenings of yellow refined gold girt about their white skin ; fifty battle-shields of silver "—and so on. This and the like passages indicate that, when you take away the golden brooches and chains and other ornaments which the storytellers hang so liberally about their heroes, there were two main garments in evidence on the persons of importance—a close-fitting smock, called *leine*, and an outer mantle called *brat* thrown over it.

Consider for a moment the interesting panel on a broken cross in the graveyard at Kells (the lower panel in fig. 8). This represents the baptism of Christ in the Jordan. The Baptist is pouring water over the head of Christ, who stands in the river. The representation of the river is interest-

ing, as it illustrates the mediaeval idea that the River Jordan owed its origin to the confluence of two sources called the Jor and the Dan. Above is the Holy Dove. But it is the two bystanders to which I wish to direct attention just now, as they exactly illustrate the costume suggested by the description in the *Courtship of Ferb*. They show the long *leine*, reaching almost to the feet, with a line round the lower hem which suggests an embroidered border ; and above it the *brat* or mantle, secured by the *milech*, the familiar pin of the Tara Brooch type.

Look now at the panel on the Monasterboice Cross which represents Christ seized by soldiers [21]. The central figure, which is the most carefully and exactly sculptured of all the figures on the Cross, is attired in the same costume. There is the *leine*, which has obviously an ornamental lower border. The mantle seems in this case to be doubled, a longer or inner mantle appearing below the hem of the outer one. Both end below in graceful spiral coils, and there are indications which suggest that the artist meant them to appear embroidered all over. The Tara Brooch pin reappears very clearly (see fig. 10, No. 16).

These figures are bareheaded ; but there is evidence that a wide cape was secured to the back of the mantle, which could be drawn over the head in inclement weather. The edge of this cape seems to reappear in the figure in the panel [22] just above.

The general details of this costume lasted long in Ireland. It appears in the famous drawing of *Irish Warriors and Poor Men*, by Albrecht Dürer, dated 1521, and now in Vienna. In front are two warriors, in an odd sort of armour, with above an inscription which means " Here go the Warmen of Ireland beyond England." Behind are three wild-looking figures inscribed, " Here go the poor men of Ireland." These three are attired in the *leine* and *brat ;* the third seems to have a cape attached at the back, while the foremost man has drawn it over his head. At an even later stage we see the same principle underlying the attire of the well-known representations of all sorts and conditions of Irish in Speed's map, published in 1611.

Though in the Middle Ages the dress of poverty, this was evidently the attire of important people at the time of our Cross, and worn when the person was not engaged in active pursuits. For rapid movement the long

and apparently close-fitting *leine* would not be convenient, and would then be drawn up into the girdle, so as to resemble a kilt. We find illustrations of this in several of the panels of the Cross. In that representing the adoration of the Wise Men [20], these, who have just come in from a journey,

FIG. 9.—Arms, Armour, and Dress in Ireland A.D. 1521. (*From a Drawing by* ALBRECHT DÜRER.)
(*By permission of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.*)

have their garments drawn up to the knees. The same is true of the principal figure in the panel just below. But it is difficult to distinguish in the sculptures between the girt-up *leine* and a true kilt, such as is certainly shown in some of the figures. Thus, in the picture of Cain and Abel [17], both figures are attired in kilts. Abel is bare from the waist upward, but

Cain has a cape thrown over the upper part of his body : this is slit up at the sides to allow free play to the arms, which are apparently bare. Very likely we have here a picture of the costume of a person of inferior rank, which is naturally less likely to be described in the romantic tales. Another kind of cape, covering the upper part of the arm, but not slit up, is shown in the crowd of kneeling figures in [19].

Yet a third variety of costume is represented by the two figures of soldiers in a panel that has already attracted our attention [21] : this possibly represents some form of military equipment. These figures wear short *braccae* or trews, reaching to just above the knee, and have the upper part of the body covered by what we may call a jerkin. On one of these there is a peculiar lozenge-shaped ornament on the left breast—apparently a kind of brooch, into which the garment is gathered. This is unique, and no ornament of this kind has ever been discovered. It is one of the unsolved puzzles of the Cross. It resembles most, perhaps, the latchet brooch of the La Tène period ; but the chronology of this type of ornament is a difficulty unless we are to assume its survival, otherwise unrecorded, to the comparatively late date of the Cross. A diagram of the ornament will be seen in fig. 10, No. 17, where the radiating lines represent the " gathers " of the garment. No. 17*a* is a latchet brooch, added for comparison.

A word or two may be said about the method of dressing the hair of the head and the face. As a rule the former seems to be worn in a kind of shock, clipped in a straight line over the forehead, though in some cases the hair is represented distinctly as curly—a feature generally emphasized in the romantic tales as a mark of beauty. Many of the figures have no moustache, but several of them testify to a fashion for very long moustaches with heavy knob-like ends hanging down to the level of the chin. This, to judge from specimens of Scandinavian sculpture, was also a Viking fashion ; possibly it was imitated in this country from Viking usage. However that may be, this heavy moustache became a mark of Irishry as late as the time of Henry VI : well-known Acts were passed at the Parliament of Trim in 1447, and again in 1465 under Edward IV, to the effect that " Every man that will be taken for an Englishman shall have no beard above his mouth," and shall have his upper lip shaven at least once a fortnight, " and if any man be found among the English contrary hereunto,

it shall be lawful to every man to take them and their goods as Irish enemies."

There is as a rule no beard, though Adam, Cain, Moses, and Saul are represented on the Cross with full beards. We certainly cannot infer from this that beards were not commonly worn, for they are very frequently represented in sculpture of the time. Indeed they were often so long and silky that they could be plaited like pigtails : there is an example of such a plaited beard on the Durrow Cross, another on the Flann Cross at Clonmacnois, and a fine specimen is shown on one of the many heads sculptured on our great architectural treasure, the West Doorway of Clonfert.

IV. With regard to the *weapons* and *implements* figured on the Cross, some objects are shown of which no actual example has survived. Such, for instance, is the curious axe-like knife with which Cain is killing Abel [17]. It looks like a kind of pruning axe, and might well be an implement of husbandry. It is not unlike the bill-hooks in the hands of the Irishmen in Dürer's picture above mentioned, but has a shorter handle. Four slight grooves on the back of the blade suggest a form of mounting on a wooden shaft by means of two loops (resembling one side of an ordinary door-hinge) : see the conjectural drawing, fig. 10, No. 1*a*. There is, however, no tool like this in the Royal Irish Academy's Collection. The bill-hook (*ibid.*, No. 1*b*) is fairly common, but always has a backward bend in the blade which the weapon figured lacks.

In the panel above, [18], are examples of a short dagger with knobbed handle, and a circular shield with a boss in the middle. This is the regular military equipment of the people of the Cross, but, strangely enough, no examples of such weapons from this particular period seem to have survived. The Viking swords which come nearest to it in point of time are all long. There is in the Royal Irish Academy's Collection a *wooden* dagger, which most nearly resembles the weapon. As for the shield, it probably was of wood or leather, so, unless specimens should come to light in a bog at some time, there is little chance of our ever seeing one. There are round shields both of wood and leather, as well as of bronze, in the Royal Irish Academy's Collection, but these are of much earlier date. The late buckler of O'Donovan of Skibbereen, though more recent, may be compared (see fig. 10, No. 3*a*). To be also noticed in this panel is the

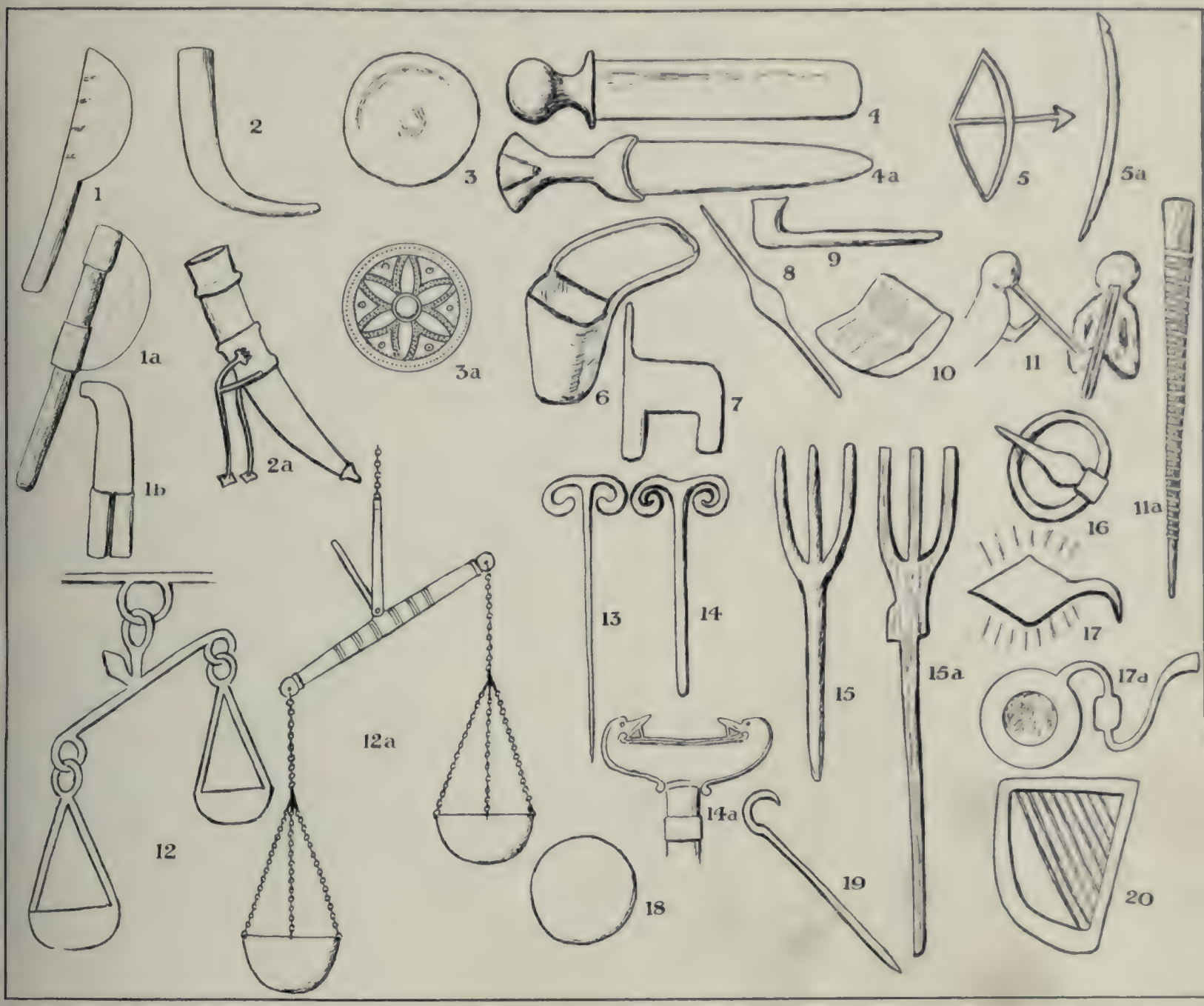


FIG. 10.—The objects figured on the Cross compared with actual specimens.[1] 1. The cleaver with which Cain kills Abel [17]: 1*a*. Possible restoration of the tool; 1*b*. An iron bill-hook. 2. The drinking-horn in the hand of Saul [18]: 2*a*. The Kavanagh Horn. 3. The shield of Saul, Goliath, &c. [18]: 3*a*. The buckler (wood with brass studs) of O'Donovan of Skibbereen. 4. The dagger of Saul, Goliath, &c. [18]: 4*a*. Wooden dagger from Ballykilmurry, Co. Wicklow. 5. Bow and arrow [34]: 5*a*. Bow from a crannog in the R.I.A. collection. 6. David's wallet [18]. 7. The seat of Saul [18] and the B.V.M. [20]. 8. David's sling [18]. 9. David's crook [18]. 10. A book [31*a*]. 11. Trumpeters [31, 31*a*]; 11*a*. A trumpet of willow-wood with bronze band, from Becan, Co. Mayo. 12. Balances [30]; 12*a* Balances from a Viking grave, Kilmainham. 13. Staff of St. Michael [30]. 14. Sceptre of Our Lord [31]: 14*a*. Crutched staff-head. 15. Trident in Satan's hand [31*b*]: 15*a*. Wooden fork found near Armagh. 16. Brooch on figure of Christ [21]. 17. Latchet-brooch (?) on figure of soldier [21]: 17*a*. Latchet-brooch of La Tène period from Slane Park, Co. Meath. 18. Loaf of bread [40, 41]. 19. Crozier [40, 41]. 20. Harp [31*a*].

[1] Some of these objects it is impossible (as the loaf of bread, for which compare the five loaves and two fishes on the Moone Cross, Plate IVB), some unnecessary (as the book), to illustrate by actual instances. The specimens have been selected with the help of Mr. E. C. R. Armstrong from the Royal Irish Academy's Museum. There are one or two other objects illustrated elsewhere, *e.g.* the chariot in [12]: and some (such as the vessel from which water is being poured on Pilate's hands [38]), which are so worn that their details cannot be made out satisfactorily.

shepherd's crook; the wallet, probably of leather, secured by a strap round the neck; and the chair on which the figure to the left is seated, with its thickly padded seat and the uncomfortable slope forward of its back. The chair in the panel next but one above is similar. This figure is drinking from a drinking horn—a detail which the artist has also introduced into his Cross at Durrow (for these objects see fig. 10, Nos. 2, 2*a*, 3, 3*a*, 4, 4*a*, 6, 7, 8, 9).

In the figure of the Crucifixion [33], soldiers with bow (fig. 10, No. 5; *cf.* 5*a*) and spear are seen with others, bearing the short dagger and shield. On the other side of the Cross the most interesting object represented is the great three-pronged fork with which Satan is driving the lost to their doom [31]. An identical object, evidently an agricultural implement of some kind, from one of the lake-dwellings, is now in the Royal Irish Academy's Collection (fig. 10, Nos. 15, 15*a*).

The circular disc [40] represents a loaf of bread, as will appear when we come to the explanation of this scene. Meanwhile we may compare it with one of the panels at Moone Abbey, where five similar discs and two fishes typify the miracle of feeding the multitude (see Plate IV, B).

Those, I think, are all the important *objects* represented on the Cross. Any others that may remain will be most suitably studied when we come to examine the panels in detail.

V. But meanwhile, what has the Cross to tell us about *music?*

Three figures among the blessed, in the Last Judgment scene [31], are represented as leading the celestial choir. The first has a harp, the second a long straight trumpet, and the third is apparently singing from a book, following with his finger the words on the page. In front of the harper also there is a book. The angel seated beside Our Lord in the Judgment scene [33] appears to be blowing a *double* trumpet (see fig. 10, No. 11).

With this orchestra may be compared that on a slab at Ardchattan, Argyllshire. Here three men in monastic attire, with cowls over their heads, are playing instruments—the first a harp, the second apparently a bagpipe with drone and chanter, and the third possibly some percussion instrument like a pair of castanets. The harp is of the same kind as that shown on the Monasterboice Cross—a triangular frame with curved

sound-board, small enough to be held on the knee of the performer. A rather larger harp, but otherwise essentially similar, is shown on the fine cross shaft at Monifieth in Forfarshire, and another is shown on one side of the slab at Nigg in Ross-shire, which is generally acknowledged to be the most intricate piece of sculpture in the Celtic style in existence.[1]

There are not more than seven or eight strings shown in these sculptured harps (see fig. 10, No. 20). This alone does not mean much, for it would in any case be difficult or impossible to represent in the sculpture a greater number ; but a fragment of an actual specimen found in a lake-dwelling in Co. Antrim, commonly but apparently wrongly called Lisnacroghera, which has yielded many antiquities of great importance, shows

Fig. 11.—Fragment of a harp from Lisnacroghera, Co. Antrim.
(*By permission of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.*)

us that the compass of the ancient harps was quite limited. This interesting object was prepared for thirteen strings, giving us thus a little over an octave and a half in its compass. That is quite sufficient when we remember that the only function of the instrument was that of supplying a unison accompaniment to voices ; instrumental music as such, and harmony, having to all intents and purposes not yet come into existence. As for the trumpet, the only specimen I have to compare with it is a long tube of willow wood, in the Royal Irish Academy's Collection, supposed to be a musical instrument (see fig. 10, Nos. 11, 11*a*). I am sorry the sculptor had no room

[1] Illustrations of these slabs will be found in J. R. Allen's *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, pp. 378, 265, and 80. There is a good cast of the Nigg stone in the National Museum, Dublin.

to add other instruments to his orchestra, but he made up for this on his Cross at Clonmacnois, where he introduced a very quaint little figure placidly blowing away at a curious triple flute.

But the great interest of this little group of musicians at Monasterboice is not so much their instruments, as is the fact that not only the singer but the instrumentalist also is provided with a book (fig. 10, No. 10). This is especially remarkable when we remember that at the time musical notation was in a most rudimentary condition. The first experiments which led to the development of the system of lines and spaces on which modern musical notation depends, were only being made about the time of the Cross; musical notation had not yet got beyond the stage of *neums* — mere glorified accents, a reminder to the singer that "some of the notes are the same as others, and some are different" (like the Professor's song in *Sylvie and Bruno*), but left the pitch and the intervals to his judgment and memory. To be able not merely to sing, but to accompany song from mere shorthand indications like these, testifies to no small degree of musical culture; and the evidence is the more valuable as not a single Irish liturgical MS. with musical notes has come down to us. When I say this I do not mean to imply that we ourselves should enjoy the performance, if we could hear it: an orchestra composed of a small harp and a coach-horn does not in any case hold out promise of high artistic possibilities, and the rude beginnings of harmony which were all that were then available would not sound satisfying to our ears.

FIG. 12.—Figure blowing a triple flute. Cross at Clonmacnois. (*From a drawing by* Sir SAMUEL FERGUSON.)

VI. I said at the beginning of this section of our subject that *science* was not yet born; the only point on which the Cross touches on what we would call science is the series of figures round the pedestal [9–12], which obviously represent the signs of the zodiac. These figures are unfortunately in a very bad condition, being all worn and injured—some of them, indeed, effaced altogether. Interspersed among the zodiacal figures are others no longer possible to identify.

VII. Lastly the Cross tells us something of the *art* of its time—both of its defects and its excellences.

It must be admitted that the drawing of the human figure on the Cross is as defective as it usually is in Celtic art. The animal figures, on the other hand, are often wonderfully graceful. It would seem, however, as though the Celtic artist could not be fettered by reality. The animals in which he excelled were grotesque creatures of the imagination. He dealt with abstractions: when pinned down to the facts of everyday life, he failed. Though the sculptured figure-panels on this Cross are full of interest, their interest is other than artistic.

Another point to be noticed is that the rules of perspective had not yet been fully discovered, or at least that it had not yet been found possible

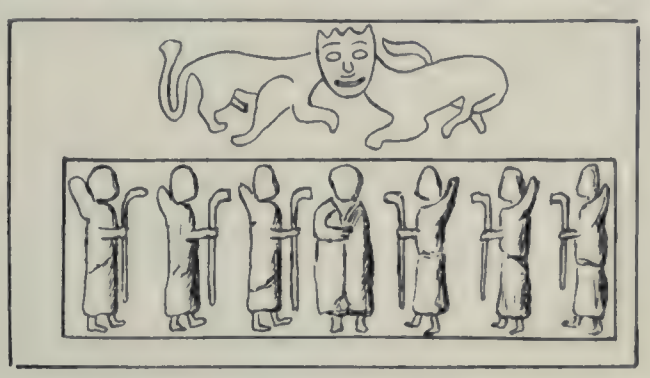


FIG. 13.—An Animal figured on a font in Yorkshire, and a Procession of ecclesiastics on a cross at Ahenny, Co. Tipperary, illustrating devices for overcoming difficulties of perspective.

to apply them to works such as this. A number of strange expedients had therefore to be invented to suggest perspective effects. If, for example, you see a piece of ancient sculpture representing a beast with two bodies and only one head, it is not to be supposed that the artist is representing a sort of nightmare monster. He is trying to solve the problem of showing an animal viewed full face, both sides of which are seen at once. So on one of the Ahenny Crosses, we have a procession of seven ecclesiastics. The central figure is full-faced, the others side-face, apparently walking towards him. In point of fact we are to suppose the procession walking out of the Cross towards the spectator, the central figure heading the rank, behind him Nos. 3 and 5 walking side by side, next Nos. 2 and 6, and Nos. 1 and 7 bringing up the rear. When we come to consider the

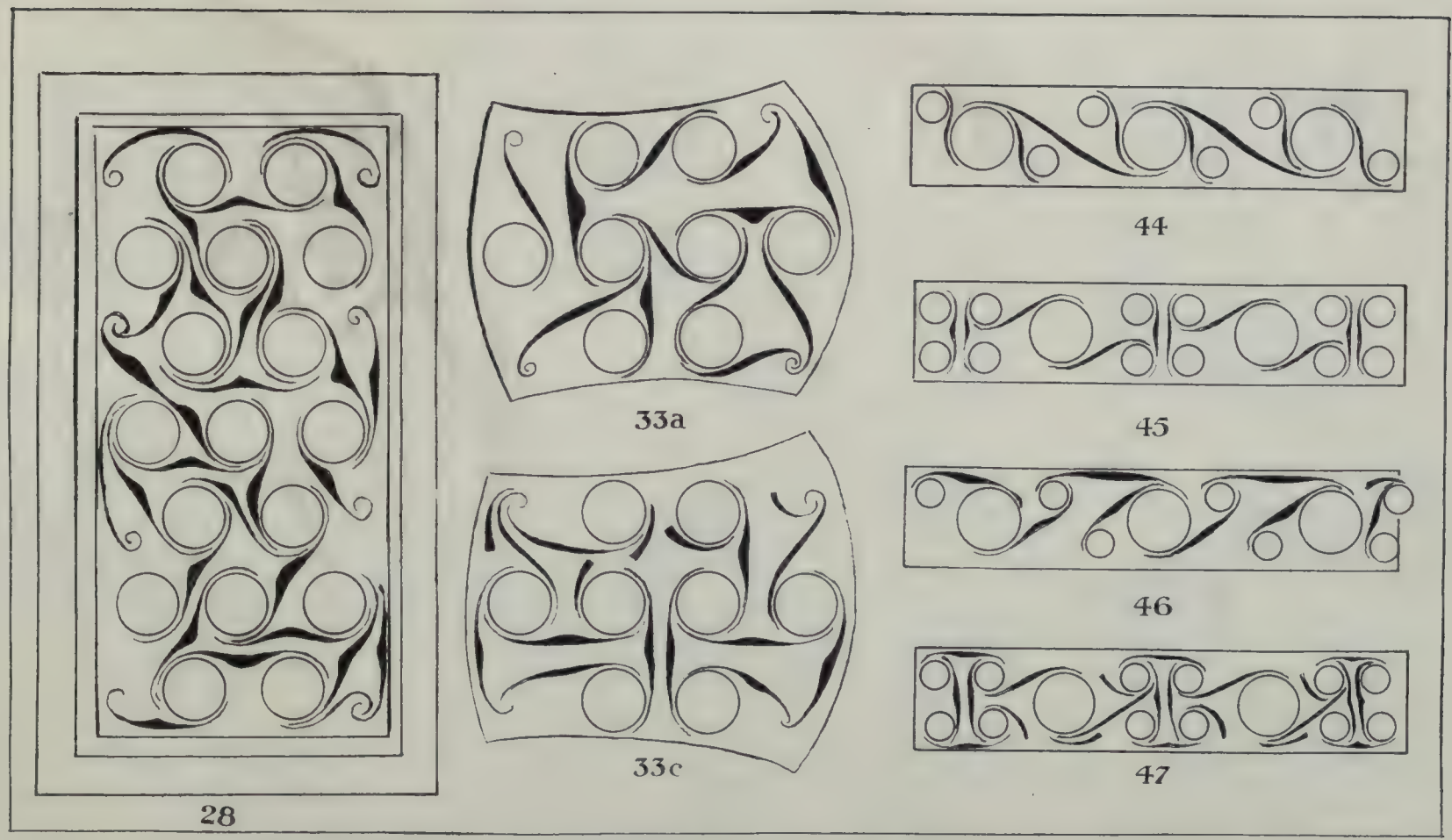


FIG. 14.—Diagram of the Spiral Patterns on the Cross. (The numbers refer to the panels.)

(*Drawing by the Author.*)

interpretation of the panels in detail, we shall see some curious examples of expedients to get rid of the difficulty of perspective.

But it is in the treatment of purely geometrical and abstract patterns that the Celtic artist excelled, and this Cross offers an almost inexhaustible field for the study of these patterns. On the ring surrounding the head alone there are seventeen different patterns.

FIG. 15.—Spirals on panel [28].
(*Photo by* MR. CRAWFORD.)

Celtic geometrical art designs fall into three main groups, spiral, interlacing, and key-patterns. Good specimens of all three are to be found on this Cross, which is unusual: it is rare that more than two of the types are found co-existing on one monument. The spiral patterns (fig. 14) are the oldest of these, having been developed in the middle of the pre-Christian Iron Age from classical models mixed with older Bronze Age traditions: and the spiral was the chief art-motive of the Celtic peoples in the ages preceding Christianity. In Christian art the spiral early began to disappear before interlacing and key-patterns, and spiral panels are in the minority in this monument.

The best example of spiral decoration on the Cross is [28]. Here a series of seventeen centres is taken, arranged in alternate rows of two and three on the panel, and are united by S and C curves which fit into one another, and form the spirals at the nuclei. The spaces left are then filled with expansions of different kinds. This is the way in which spiral patterns in general are constructed, though there is an infinite variety of design possible, according to the distribution of the nuclei and the means whereby they are united by curves.

Interlacing patterns began to develop about the end of the eighth century out of simple fret patterns, such as we see in Roman mosaics. By taking a plain diagonal fret, and by, so to speak, cutting the cords and re-tying them in a different way, an interlacing pattern is produced.[1] On one of

[1] See Romilly Allen's *Celtic Art in Pagan and Christian Times*, where the principles of the constructions of Celtic art-patterns are fully described and illustrated.

the sides of the Cross there are three very elaborate patterns [24, 25, 26] which have all the same geometrical foundation (see Plate VII.).

A curious taste is displayed in the panel below the spiral, where eight men are taken and treated as purely geometrical objects, their legs, arms, and beards being elaborately intertwined. This device of interlaced men is also to be seen on the Cross at Clonmacnois, at Ahenny, and also in one of the great series of sculptured slabs at Meigle in Forfarshire.

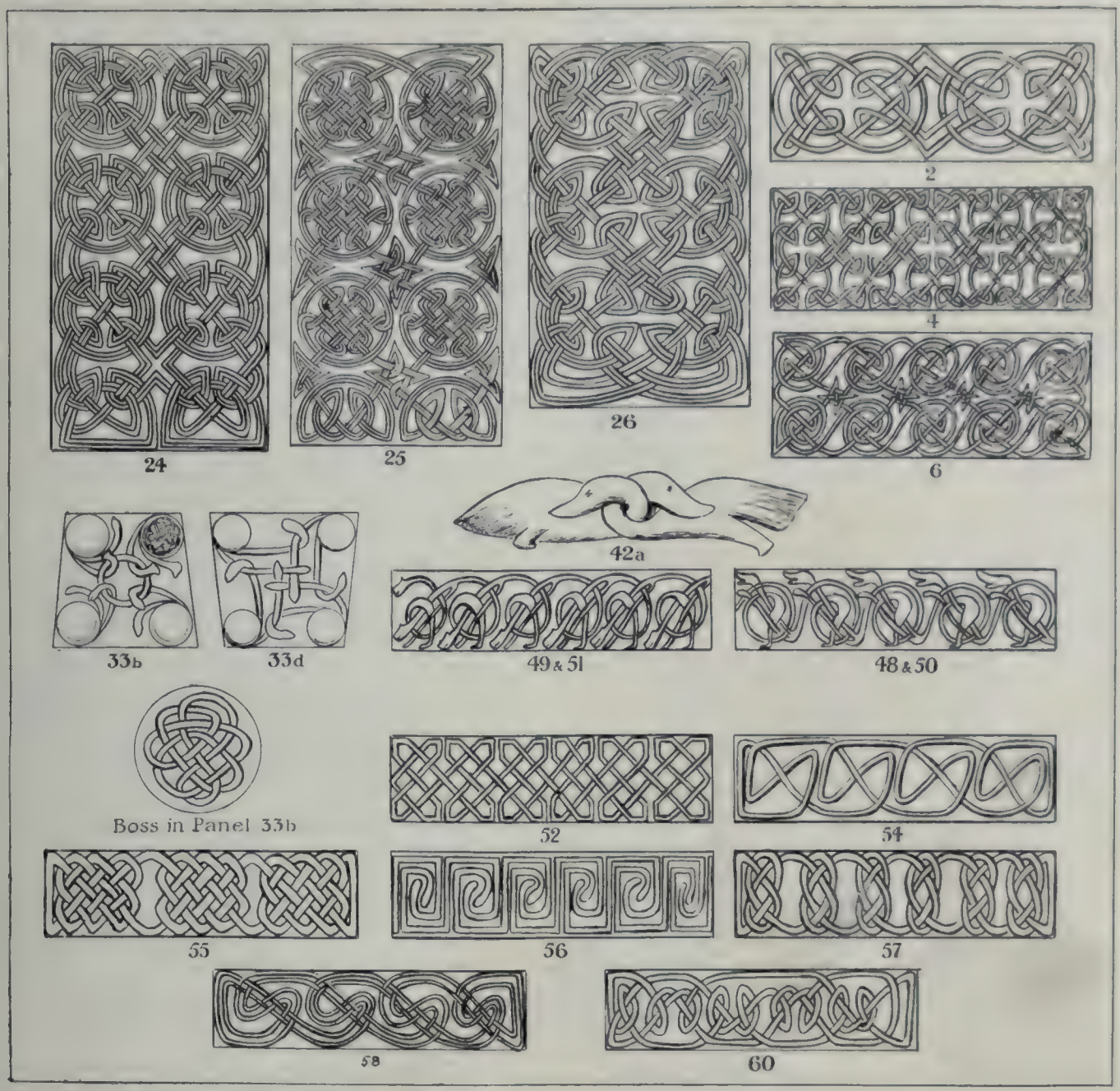
The key-pattern is confined, on this Cross, to the base or pedestal on which it stands, and to the panels [53, 61, 63] on the ring. They are shown

FIG. 16.—Panel [27] with interlaced human figures.

FIG. 17.—Diagram of the same panel.

(*Photo and Drawing by* MR. CRAWFORD.)

in fig. 18. The key-pattern is built up on the same kind of geometrical basis as the interlacing pattern, except that when the lines meet, instead of intersecting, they turn so as to avoid intersecting. Specially to be noticed is the combination of the key-pattern with spirals in panel [61] : the same device occurs at Termon Feichin. On each of the four faces of the pedestal there are two panels end to end, containing an elaborate interlacing and key-pattern alternately. This shows that the two types of ornament existed as separate classifications in the artist's mind. Three of these panels are almost completely effaced, but it is clear that the pattern of each panel was different from the rest. These panels alone would give the sculptor of this Cross a high position among Celtic artists.



Diagrams of Interlacing Patterns on the Cross.

(*Drawing by the Author.*)

Foliage was curiously neglected in early Celtic art—in fact it scarcely exists. But a distinct " floral " feeling is to be traced in the divergent

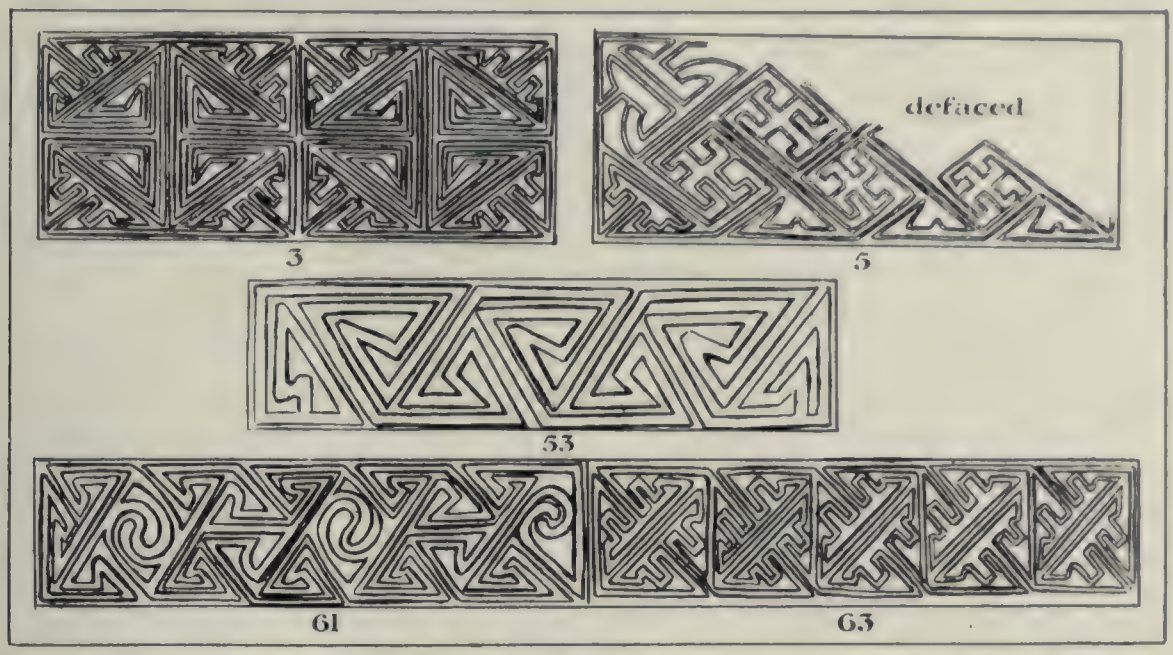


FIG. 18.—Key-patterns on the Cross. (The terminations of panel [53] are much worn and very doubtful.)
(*Drawing by the Author.*)

spiral ornament above the figures of SS. Paul and Antony [41], fig. 36. There is, moreover, one very charming panel [29] in which indeed our great sculptor of a thousand years ago has reached his high-water mark. This shows a coiling plant, and through each of the six coils there gambols a playful little animal, kicking up its hind legs. The hind legs and tails of the two middle animals make a little bit of fret-work in the middle of the panel. Two birds feed on the topmost coil. The whole panel is full of life and gracefulness.

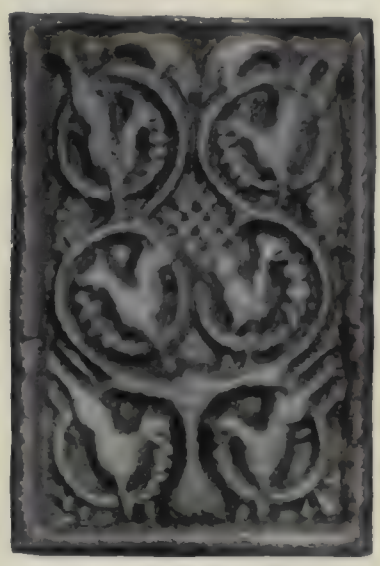


FIG. 19.—Panel [29].
(*Photo by* MR. CRAWFORD.)

Lastly we may mention the animal and human figures used as decorations on the Cross. Of the former are the two charming animal figures, chasing one another (fig. 20), on panel [39]; the quaint

figures in the narrow panels [13, 14, 16] in the base of the shaft; and the twined snakes on [59, 62], which are shown in figs. 20, 30. The interlacements on the west face of the ring [48–51] are founded on animal figures, and there is also underneath [42] a couple of birds with necks intertwined. Diagrams of these will be found

FIG. 20.—Panels [39, 58–60].
(*From a photograph by* MR. A. M'GOOGAN.)

on Plate VII. Panels [33*b*, 33*d*] present very ingenious devices of twined snakes, their tails coiled round bosses (see Plate VII). These bosses have been decorated with minute basket-like interlacing, which has now, however, weathered away beyond all hope of recovery except in one case. An attempt at drawing out an enlargement of the device on this boss is added to the plate. It has been drawn with the help of a

telescope, but the original is so worn that only an approximation to the device can be given. The human heads between the coils of the snakes on panels [59, 62], and the two dwarfs pulling each other by the beard [14], are examples of the use of human figures as motives of decoration.

FIG. 21.—Panel [14]. (*From a drawing by the author.*)

III

MUIREDACH'S MONASTERBOICE

We now come to the question, what can the Cross tell us of the life that passed around it, within the precincts of the monastery itself ?

And first, can it tell us anything more of the Abbot who caused it to be made, beyond the meagre details recorded in the Annals ? I think it can. We may be sure that he exercised some oversight over the choice and treatment of the subjects sculptured on the Cross, while leaving to the artist the designing of the purely ornamental panels ; and where they differ from the treatment of the same subject on other crosses presumably by the same maker, we may, perhaps, detect the working of the Abbot's mind.

Whoever designed this Cross was a man to whose mind beautiful things and beautiful thoughts made an irresistible appeal. The sculptor has here been inspired to put forth his full strength ; he has surpassed all his achievements elsewhere. The interlacements are of great beauty and ingenuity, and even if the Cross had not the interest of the figured scenes, it would still be one of the foremost monuments of early Irish Christian art. But it is not merely in the inspiration which caused the sculptor thus to excel himself that we seem to detect the working of the mind of Muiredach. There are two noteworthy details in the figure sculpture that may have been due to his suggestion. The representation of the Crucifixion [33] is practically identical on all the crosses which I venture to attribute to our sculptor, and therefore there must be some reason when we find a deviation from his ordinary conception of the scene. Now on this Cross there is such a deviation. He has had the beautiful fancy of placing two angel figures, one on each side, tenderly supporting the dying Saviour's head. This is neither unique nor original at Monasterboice ; it occurs in a few other Irish representations of the Crucifixion, as, for instance, a bronze plaque of crude workmanship, found long ago at Athlone

and now in the Royal Irish Academy's Collection.[1] But one has a feeling that this is an idea that would have attracted the mind of the designer of the Cross, and that it was he who caused the sculptor to depart from his usual scheme in order to give it expression.

And when we turn to the other side of the Cross, we find the same poet's mind at work. Can anything be prettier than the picture of the little bird, perched on the harp of the heavenly minstrel, and pouring into his ear the melody which he is rendering on his instrument [31*a*] ? In all the many wonder-visions of heaven which the Irish allegorists delighted to weave, the song of birds is one of the greatest joys which they pictured therein. In the ancient *Vision of Adamnán* we read of the three noble birds standing before the Throne, and how they and the archangels lead the song of the heavenly choir. And here is a description from another Vision, written about eight hundred or a thousand years later, yet conceived in the same spirit : " And he saw streams of exquisite pure water, and like to ravishing untainted wine was the scent coming from those streams : and many trees, lovely and various, among those streams, so that it were fulness of pleasure and joy to be gazing at the fruits and flowers upon them. And beautiful birds were to be seen in the tops of those trees, singing melody, and the lutes, organs, and instruments of music of the world, were they played in harmony, sweeter would be the sound of one of the birds than of all these together." So through the ages they dreamed of the happy world to come, and so Muiredach pictured it upon his Cross.

And I think there is yet another pleasant hint of the character of the designer of the Cross. The artist who was so keenly alive to the beauty of things and thoughts, could not fail to appreciate one of the most beautiful of all animals—the common domestic cat ; and it is very charming to see how in half playful, half poetic mood he has confessed to this little weakness of his. In mediaeval monuments we often see the effigy of a knight in armour, with his great hunting-hound couching at his feet, and beside him the figure of his lady with at her feet the pet lap-dogs which used to wile away for her the tedium of life in a mediaeval castle. So our good Abbot has not been ashamed to put figures of his pets on the Cross, even on the panel where he asks for the prayers of the passer-by. Here are two quaint

[1] See Coffey's Guide to the Christian Antiquities in the collection, p. 68, where it is figured.

little figures of cats (Fig. 22), one of them licking a newly born kitten, the other disposing of a bird she has just caught ; and the letters of the inscription play hide-and-seek between them !

The cat, indeed, was a favourite in monasteries, as a pet as well as a destroyer of mice. Perhaps there is not one document of all that have come down to us from ancient Ireland that possesses more human interest than the four leaves of a student's notebook which have found a resting-place in the Benedictine Convent of St. Paul in Carinthia. It is a queer miscellany of jottings of all sorts. It begins with notes about the life of Vergil. Then come memoranda about grammar and the geography of the Holy Land, and curious details of zoology, as for instance, " the lion is much afraid of a white cock " ; " the nightingale hatches her eggs by singing

FIG. 22.—The two Cats and Inscription, panel [15].
ŌR [=oroit] DO MUIREDACH LAS NDERNAD I [=in] CHROS (" A prayer for Muiredach by whom was made the cross "). (*From a drawing by the author.*)

to them as well as by sitting on them " ; " when the lion is sick it eats a monkey, for monkey-meat is a lion's medicine ; in the same way, a leopard eats a wild goat, the bear eats ants, and the deer eats twigs. Thus, every beast knoweth what is good for it, but thou, O man, knowest not what is good for thee." Then come some more notes on Vergil, a diagram of the signs of the zodiac, memoranda on logic, some muddle-headed notes on Greek grammar, and so on. As our student was at his work his attention wandered, and his eye fell on his pet cat, at the moment intent on watching a mouse-hole. He was fascinated ; he laid down his pen, and let the Greek grammar and the other things take care of themselves for a while. And the whimsical idea struck him that there was an analogy between himself and his little friend ; that as the cat was hunting mice, so he was hunting knowledge. The thought took shape as a poem, which luckily

he scribbled in his note-book. When he had worked off his little *jeu d'esprit* he went back to his Vergil, I suppose without the least suspicion that he had now accomplished his life's work ; for the waters of forgetfulness have for ten centuries been rolling over everything else he may have done. Even his name is forgotten, though he has immortalised that of his cat. Though most people who may read these lines are probably familiar with the poem, an attempt at a version of it may be given here for the benefit of any who may not have come across it. Besides illustrating the cat-figures on the Cross, it has the not inconsiderable interest of being one of the very oldest secular poems in the Irish language :

We two, I and *Pangur Bán*,
By our several arts are drawn :
For a mouse-hunt he's inclined,
Hunting knowledge is my mind.

With my book to sit I love
Glory or renown above :
Pangur loves his playful art,
So no envy grieves his heart.

When we two are here alone
Tedium is never known :
For we've endless sport, to furnish
Practice that our wits can burnish.

Now he gives a spring—and see,
There's a mouse caught, valorously !
While I hunt my game, and get
Some hard saying in my net.

See his bright eye shining there
On the wall, with steady glare !
While my eyes—alas, so weak !—
Steadfastly do learning seek.

When a mouse is firmly seized
By his swift claws, how he's pleased !
I am happy too, when I
Answers to hard questions spy.

Though we're here alone all day,
Neither blocks the other's way :
Each enjoys his several art,
Each one occupied apart.

Thus he does his duty meet
With a mastery complete ;
While I labour, drawing light
From the gloom, both day and night.

The monastery of which Muiredach was Abbot was one of the oldest in Ireland. It was founded by Buite, its first Abbot, who died on the day that witnessed the birth of St. Columba—about twenty-five or thirty years after St. Patrick's death. The English name " Monasterboice " is a corruption of *Mainister Buite*, Buite's Monastery. A fragmentary life of the founder exists ;[1] like the majority of such documents, it consists chiefly of the records of miracles wrought by him, yet reading between the lines something can be made out of the outline of his career. He was of the Cianachta of Bregia, that is, he was a native of the district where he founded

[1] The Latin text of this life will be found in Plummer's *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, vol. i. p. 87.

his monastery. Tradition said that he was baptized at Mellifont—a story which possibly had some influence on the choice of the site of the great Cistercian house whose ruins are among the best-known in Ireland. Indeed the " honey-fountain " which gave that place its pretty name was said to have sprung forth when the infant's hand was caused to touch the earth, there being no other water at hand suitable for the sacrament. He seems to have studied in Wales—the *Life* says Italy, but that has been recognised as a corruption—apparently under St. Teilo of Llandaff, though this is not free from chronological difficulties ; and then to have made his way, with a following of holy men and virgins, to the court of Nechtan, King of the Picts, in Forfarshire. He did the King some service—the *Life* says he raised him from the dead—in reward for which the King presented him with the castle in which the service was wrought ; and as witness of the substantial truth of the story, the two adjacent place-names of Dunnichen (*Dun Nechtain*, the fortress of Nechtan) and Kirkbuddo, the Church of Boethius or Buite, remain to this day. From Nechtan's court he made his way to Dal Riada, the territory in the N.E. corner of Ireland, where, in reward for raising from the dead the daughter of the local chieftain, he obtained land, and on it erected a church where he established a priest who belonged to his own clan. Leaving Dal Riada, he proceeded towards his own people ; but once more on the way obtained land in a place now unknown, called Dornglais, and founded there another church. At last he arrived in the territory of his clan, was received hospitably by the chieftain, who made him a grant of land on which he founded his monastery.

The story of the death of St. Buite is strange. It is told how, on a day at the end of April or beginning of May, he was strolling through the cemetery, and was seized with an unspeakable longing for the life of the other world ; whereupon suddenly the angels above him let down a ladder of gold, on which he mounted to the celestial regions. The brethren of the monastery were apprised of his loss, and broke into bitter lamentations when they knew that their head had been taken from them without a word of counsel or of benediction ; whereupon the angels brought him back to earth again; though, like Moses, it was necessary that his face should be covered with a disc of glass, that he might see without being seen. And he remained among his followers till the following December, exhorting

them and telling them many things about the future life; ending with a prophecy of the greatness of Columba, the saint born on the day when he finally left the earth. He prophesied also that Columba would visit and bless the monastery thirty years after his departure. This prophecy was fulfilled, as we learn from the Lismore Life of St. Columba; the Apostle

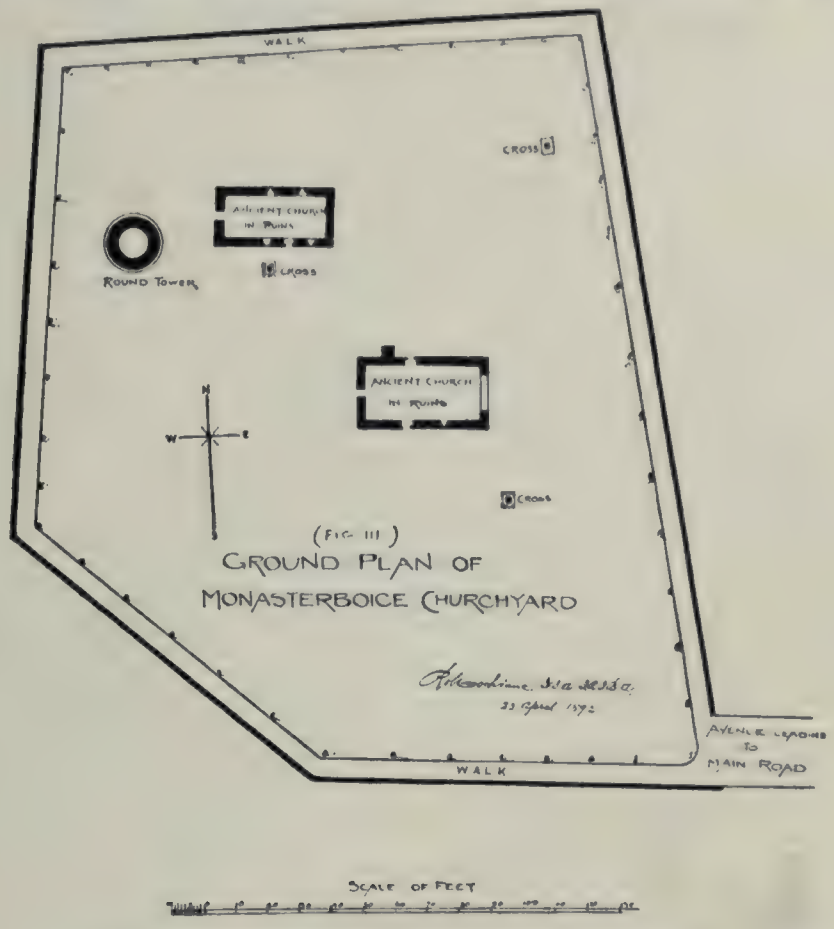


FIG. 23.—Ground plan of Monasterboice Churchyard.
(*By permission of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.*)

of Scotland came and found the ladder (there said to have been of glass) on which Buite had ascended to heaven.

Though thus one of the oldest Christian foundations in the island, Monasterboice seems to have been one of the minor houses. At any rate its records were imperfectly kept or preserved, for between the death of its founder and the year 723 the Annals fail to give us the names of the abbots. After that date there is a succession of twenty-one abbots, none

of whom, however, seems to have been of any special note except our Muiredach, the fourteenth of the series. The twenty-first abbot of this list died in 1122, and after this date we hear no more of the monastery. Probably the establishment of the imposing Cistercian house of Mellifont in the immediate neighbourhood, in the year 1142, led to the humbler Celtic monastery being starved out of existence. One of the two ruined churches in the graveyard is probably of the thirteenth or fourteenth century: it may be simply a parochial church, built after the disappearance of the monastic foundation.

Something of the daily life in an ancient Celtic monastery like this can be pictured with the aid of a most important document recently discovered in a MS. in the library of the Royal Irish Academy. It was written by an inmate of the monastery of Tallaght, Co. Dublin, somewhere about the year 835—nearly a hundred years before our Cross was set up. A few points only can be here extracted; those interested must be referred to the full publication, in the *Proceedings* of the Royal Irish Academy, vol. xxix, p. 115.

The name of the founder of Tallaght was Mael-Ruain—one of the countless unfortunate results of the loss of the Irish language has been the vile corruption of this honourable name to "St. Moll Rooney"! He was a most strict disciplinarian, and, as in all the other monasteries, life was very exactly regulated in his house by precepts and prohibitions. For instance, not a drop of beer was allowed to be consumed in the monastery in his time. A brother abbot suggested that he might relax this rule on the three chief feasts, but Mael-Ruain was adamant. "So long as I shall give rules," said he, "and so long as my rules are here obeyed, the liquor that causes men to forget God shall not be drunk here." "But," said his friend, "my monks have leave to drink it, and they shall be in Heaven with thy monks." "True," said Mael-Ruain, "but peradventure thy monks will have something for the fire of Purgatory to cleanse. My monks will not." Music was also forbidden at Tallaght. A certain hermit was in favour with Mael-Ruain till he offered to play the pipes to him. Then the stern abbot sent him off: "My ears are closed to earthly music," said he, "that they may be open to the music of heaven." Another thing he insisted upon was the daily repetition of the whole Psalter. He was asked once whether fifty psalms would not be enough, but he was quite

immovable : not a man was to go to table till he had accomplished the task. At meal times the Gospels were read aloud, one Gospel to each quarter of the year. A very strict observance of Sunday was enforced. Herbs cut on Sunday, or bread baked, vegetables cooked, and blackberries and nuts plucked on Sunday were not to be eaten ; gathering of apples, or even lifting a fallen apple from the ground on Sunday, was likewise forbidden. Indeed, the writer of the tract relates how once he took a bath on Saturday after evensong, which was accounted a breach of the Sabbath, and was punished by withholding butter and bacon from him during the whole of the following day.

We hear very little of Monasterboice having suffered violence such as so frequently befell the larger houses like Armagh or Clonmacnois. It had nevertheless its share of troubles. The Foreigners—that is, the Scandinavian settlers—penetrated as far as this, and in 969 Domnall, King of Ireland, came up against them and plundered them, burning 350 of them alive in one house. Those who suppose that the dwellings in Ireland a thousand years ago were mere kraals or wigwams would do well to mark this passage : it is not a small house that will hold 350 people. In 1097 the Round Tower was burnt—perhaps its distorted shape, which every visitor notices, as well as its ruined cap, are the effects of the fire ; and in the tower the treasures and books of the monastery were stored, and perished. From one point of view this was a greater catastrophe than the other. Those unhappy wretches whom the King put to a cruel death—their troubles are long since over, and round the Cross which on that day echoed their despairing shrieks we hear to-day the hum of bees, and the song of birds, and the laughter of children. But Ireland still laments, and ever must lament, the loss of the library of Monasterboice ; the library which nurtured the great scholar Flann Mainistrech, the one man of the place beside Muiredach who has left his mark in history. Perhaps even more than of Muiredach I should like to make the Cross speak of this man to us. No doubt he often stood before it and pondered over its sculptures.

Flann of Monasterboice was probably the most learned historian that Ireland had up till then produced. The Annals speak of him in language almost extravagant. " The chief lector and historical sage of Ireland," " The paragon of the Gael in literature, wisdom, history, poetry, and

science," " The best learned chronicler in those parts of the world," " The final sage of the Gael "—such are some of the testimonies to his scholarship. Down to the seventeenth century all the historians that follow him appeal to Flann as to an authority indisputable, much as modern writers appeal to the works of O'Curry and O'Donovan. On the history of Ireland Flann had said the last word, and there was no getting behind his word. It is really extraordinary how this one man, working in a comparatively small monastery, acquired the reputation which he enjoyed for well nigh six hundred years. He died in November 1056—about fifty years before the writing of our oldest extant manuscript of history. It is pleasant to picture this old scholar, poring over the books in the library, many of which he has no doubt copied and annotated himself, and working out the historical theories by which he gained his enduring fame. But it is sad, too, to reflect that the books which we see piled around him, which surely contained more wisdom of the ancients than even he was able to digest in his own works—of these books not one has survived, and save for some chance allusions we know nothing about their contents. There is a little book to be seen at Flann's elbow, which he calls *Leabhar Gearr*—the Short Book—containing, among other things, details about the burial-places of the Irish chieftains ; and we know that this Short Book was afterwards stolen by a student from Monasterboice, taken away by stealth over the sea, and never heard of again. Another manuscript was called the Book of Monasterboice, among whose contents was a life of St. Finnchua, which was copied into the still extant Book of Lismore. It is possible that a hunt through Irish literature might bring to light some other scraps of information about the books with which Flann is busied when we visit him, most if not all of which presumably perished in the great fire. But when that catastrophe occurred Flann was happily forty years in his grave, so that he was spared the sorrow of it. Books were familiar to Muiredach ; they enter conspicuously into more than one of the panels of his Cross.

I certainly think that as we wander in thought through the monastery, and picture it alive with its varied activities, it is to the writing-room that we would most frequently retrace our steps. What a wealth of fascination there is in it, as we can gather from the few relics that time has left us of the ancient libraries of Ireland ! When we turn over the Book of Armagh,

for instance, we are almost awe-struck to think that the man who wrote that book had at his side a document in the handwriting of St. Patrick himself, or that a certain note written later into the same book was written in the actual presence of no less a person than Brian, the conqueror of Clontarf ; that his eyes rested on the ink before us while it was still wet. And likewise that the Book of Durrow was copied directly from a text written by the hand of Columba. These books bring us very near to contact with the men who have so deeply impressed the history of our island. But perhaps even more interesting are the less imposing but no less vivid human touches that scribes, whose very names are unknown, have succeeded on leaving on their handiwork. The scriptorium is not unlike a modern schoolroom : in silence the young brethren and students are sitting there, writing out and multiplying books, sometimes from dictation, sometimes by copying. An invigilator sits with them to preserve discipline. But unregenerate human nature has its opportunities in a monastic scriptorium as much as in a schoolroom. Naughty schoolboys—and probably naughty schoolgirls also, if there are any such—evade the rule of silence by scribbling surreptitious notes to their companions. And manuscripts have come down to us with just such notes scribbled in Latin or in Irish in the margins, obviously intended for the eye of the writer's neighbour. Some of them have a very schoolboyish look about them—" I will go if you like." " Ruadri has just come in." " May Patrick and Brigid grant that Mael-Brigte [the invigilator] be not angry with what I have written to-day ! " " Oh Holy Virgin, how my chest aches ! " " I have a rotten pen and watery ink." " This is a hard page, let whoever reads it sweat." " Our white cat is running away." Such sentences are like snap-shots : they bring before us the grumbler, the poor boy struggling, it may be, with some pulmonary disease, the incorrigible who caused trouble to Mael-Brigte, yet stood in awe of him. We have all known modern reincarnations of the " swanker " (if we may use this expressive abomination of a word !) who wrote in excessively microscopic characters in one MS., " If I liked I could write the whole book like this ! " And I think we can yet hear echoes of the sigh of relief of the student who was studying a dreary treatise on grammar, and scribbled in the margin *tempus est prandii*—" it's dinner-time ! "

And this reminds ourselves that time is pressing on, and we must tear

ourselves away. We give a farewell glance around the room, noticing the rows of ornamental leather book-satchels hanging on the wall, containing the more valuable manuscripts, and we make our way back to the Cross. Time will not allow us to linger over the other buildings ; we may give a mere glance into the simple little chapel, and the austere cells that form the domestic parts of the settlement.

Up to now we have been looking on the Cross, to which we now come back, as a source of information for ourselves on Irish history and archaeology—just as we may use the Bible as a text-book of Hebrew history and archaeology. In both cases this use is legitimate, if we remember that this was not the primary purpose for which the Bible was written or the Cross erected. Muiredach had a solemn purpose and a lofty message, and we must not lose sight of his original intention. In a world where books were few and dear, the unlettered were taught by symbols and by pictures, and it was for the instruction of such simple folk that this great art treasure was added to the riches of Ireland.

At the outset we pictured ourselves, unseen visitors from another century, standing beside the Abbot as he examines the Cross he has just caused to be erected, and taking, so to speak, a private view of it to make sure that it is all as he had wished it to be. As we watch him scrutinising its details, we may occupy ourselves in recalling what the annalists, in recording his death, say about him. He was not only Abbot of Monasterboice, but was also Vice-abbot of Armagh, and had he lived three years longer he might on the death of Mael-Brigte, the Abbot of Armagh, have been translated to that important office and the proud title of " Successor of Patrick." Then he was *Ard-mhaer* (High Steward) of the Southern Ui Neill. The duties of the High Steward of such a sept are not, so far as I am aware, very clearly defined anywhere : one of the difficulties that we meet in studying ancient Irish social history is the fact that the old writers assume knowledge the tradition of which is now lost and cannot be recovered. However, it obviously was a position of responsibility, the duties of which extended over the modern counties of Longford, Westmeath, Meath, part of King's County, and probably also part of Armagh ; that being the range of the territory of the sept in question. It considerably increases our respect for the Abbot to find that he could spare time from the labours

incidental to administering his monastery and his stewartry to procure the erection of the work of art with which we are concerned. He must surely have been a remarkable man, who was abbot of one monastery, vice-abbot of the chief foundation of Patrick, administrator of a fourth of the eastern half of Ireland, and, as the Cross shows us, a generous patron of art.

Further, he is called " head of counsel of all the men of Bregia, clerical and lay." Surely no mean testimony to a man's wisdom ! Traverse the plain that stretches from the Liffey to the Boyne, and reflect that there was once a man to whom every dweller there looked up to as a counsellor in the difficulties that beset their way through life. Half a province of Ireland trusted themselves to the guidance of the man standing by our side.

But now the brethren of the monastery begin to assemble reverently before their Superior, and when they are gathered together we may hear him speak a homily to them, expounding all that had been in his mind when he caused the Cross to be made ; so that they in their turn might know to pass on the teaching to the folk that came from time to time to the monastery for devotion or for instruction.

We need not imagine what he would say on the subject of the Cross itself, and all that it commemorates and symbolises. We cannot imagine what he would say on the meaning of the wheel surrounding it ; perhaps he would know as little as we do of the reason why Celtic crosses are surrounded by a wheel. Some have supposed it to be a derivative from the monogram of the *Chi-Rho*, the loop of the Greek letter P having become exaggerated till it swept round the whole device. Others have put forward a view, more probable as it seems to me,[1] that the wheel is a simple glory or halo round the Cross. It is; however; useless to guess on such a subject as this, so for a time we may stand aside as the Abbot expounds these primal mysteries to his followers, returning at a later stage of the homily, when he has begun to speak of the meaning of the separate panels.

There are in all seventy panels on the Cross, counting the twenty panels on the wheel. Even the upper panels of the wheel, which cannot be seen from below, are decorated. Of these, forty-four contain geometrical or other ornament, which have been sufficiently described already. It now remains to speak of the panels containing figure subjects.

[1] The fact that the Chi-Rho monogram has never been found in Ireland is an objection to the explanation suggested.

Possibly one of the brethren might ask the Abbot the natural question that occurs to ourselves, namely, why waste so much space on mere ornament: surely, if the function of the Cross was to convey instruction, it would be well to fill every inch of space with storied scenes, from which instruction could be given. I can imagine the question asked, and being met with a gentle rebuke. The Abbot would remind the questioner that it was their custom to enrich the vellum Gospels with cunning knots and scrolls. He might call to his mind the Gospels treasured at Kells, not very far off, which is even yet the pride of Ireland: he might also tell him of that other wonderful book at Kildare, so marvellously decorated that it was believed that an angel had guided the artist's hand; a book that was still a wonder in the thirteenth century, but which our eyes can never hope to look upon. It would then be fitting that this Cross, a Gospel in stone, should be decorated with devices like to those that glorified their Gospels in vellum. And was it not also right that on some parts of the Cross labour should be expended from which no direct return was to be expected? for that it was more blessed to give than to receive. Such, I conceive, is the "philosophy" (if I may so call it) of the decoration of this and similar crosses with abstract ornament.

Beginning with the base of the Cross, now woefully mutilated, the Abbot would point out the series of signs of the zodiac—a device uncommon in early Irish sculpture, though frequent in the lintels and tympana of the doorways of Norman churches in England. Probably it was meant to suggest to the observer the vault of the sky and the world beyond it; or, perhaps, the ceaseless succession of days and years, the march of time, that leads on rapidly and inevitably to death and to judgment.

It must be noticed, however, that though certain signs of the zodiac are easily recognisable—as Leo, Taurus, Aries, and Gemini in [9], Capricornus (?), Sagittarius, and Aquarius (?) in [10], Cancer (?) in the much defaced panel [11], yet these are not in their proper order, and they are interspersed with figures—such as the rider at the end of [10] [1]—which are not zodiacal signs. Neither is the procession of riders preceding a charioteer in [12]. These have not yet been explained: an exactly similar procession

[1] This rider illustrates the attitude so common in Irish representations of horsemen, with the leg stretched horizontally forward; contrast the riders in [12].

appears on the crosses at Clonmacnois and at Kells. There can be no doubt that the zodiac was in the mind of the artist, but he

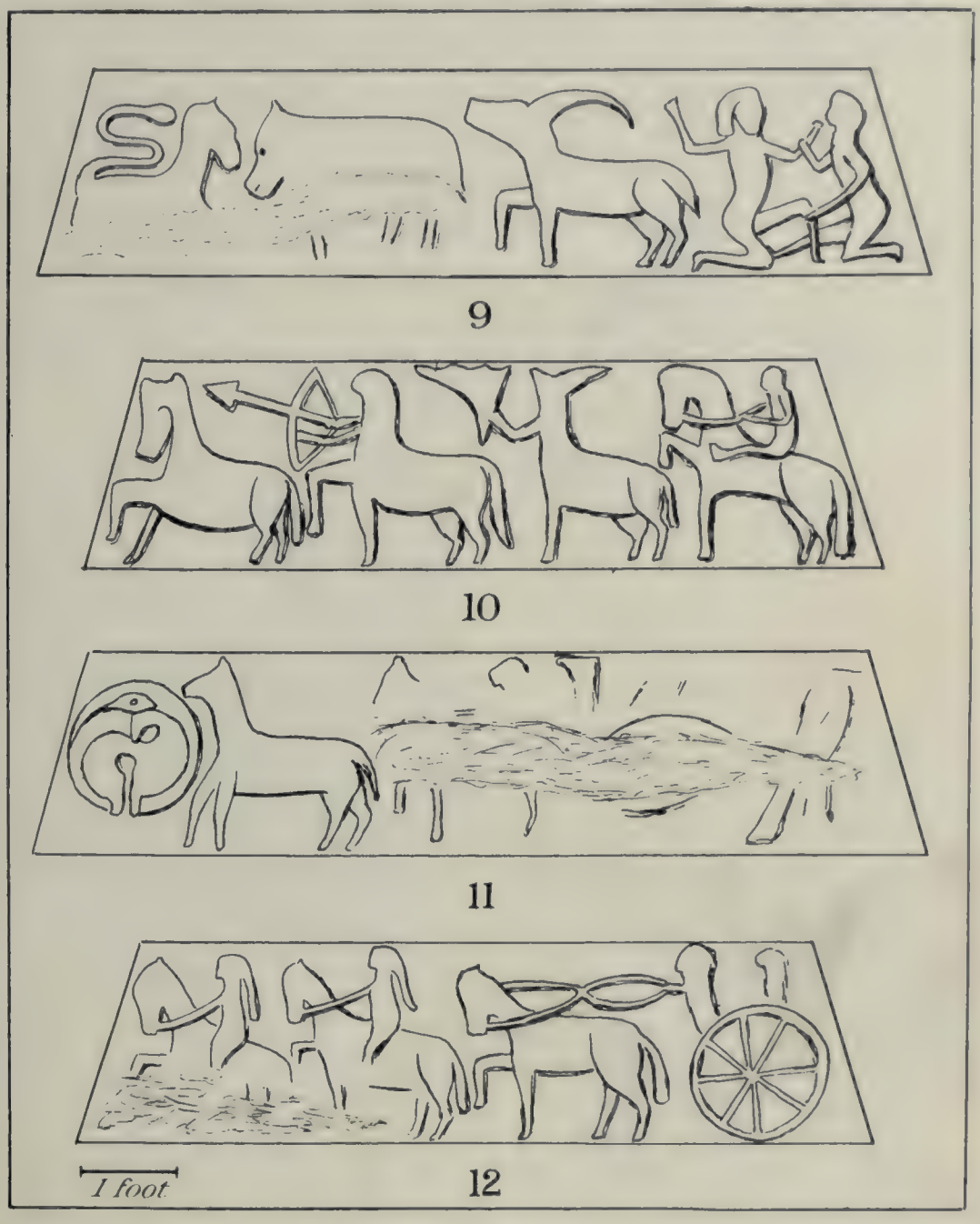


FIG. 24.—The Zodiac.
(*From a drawing by the Author.*)

treated the subject very freely, and mingled it with ideas which we are no longer able to reconstruct.

Next we come to the panels on the stem of the Cross. At the bottom of the first face are two animals (perhaps lions) playing or fighting with one another [13] ; above which are four panels, each enclosed in a rope border, which we may take in order, beginning with the lowermost.

The first [17] is a double panel, containing two scenes. At the left-hand side are Adam and Eve, standing under the forbidden tree, which is heavily laden with fruit. Round the tree is coiled the serpent, whispering into the ear of Eve, who is handing the apple to her husband.

Fig. 25.—Panels [17, 18]. (*Photograph by* Mr. H. S. Crawford.)

This is the commonest of all the scenes sculptured on the high crosses. It occurs on most of the crosses that have figure subjects, though, strange to say, it is not found among the numerous panels on the taller cross at Monasterboice. It is fitting that this scene should begin the series : the story gives the explanation once for all of how sin entered the world, and the reason for the necessity of the scheme of redemption of which the Cross tells the story.

The figures of Cain and Abel follow naturally. As in Adam all die, so the first murder is the natural pendant of the first sin. The scene is

much less common than that of Adam and Eve ; but the two are once more grouped together in one panel on one of the crosses at Kells. Cain is represented as a middle-aged man with a beard, who grasps Abel, pictured as a beardless youth, and buries his cleaver in his head.

The panel next above [18] represents the duel of David and Goliath. In the middle are the two chief combatants. David has his shepherd's crook over one shoulder, and in the other hand he holds the sling, hanging open to show that the stone has already been cast. Over his shoulder is suspended the wallet in which the stones were stored. The giant is brought down on his knees, his hand pressed against his forehead, to indicate that he has been struck there. He has a conical helmet, being the only one of all the figures on the Cross with any head-covering. He bears the round shield and short dagger of which I have already spoken. The seated figure at the left is no doubt King Saul. He also has the round shield and short sword, and is drinking from a horn. After a good deal of thought over this curious detail, for which there is of course no scriptural warrant, I have come to the conclusion that it is intended to suggest the carelessness, and shall we say royal *dolce far niente* of the monarch, who lets the youth David fight his battles for him. Saul's drinking horn, and an actual example with which it can be compared, are illustrated in fig. 10, Nos. 2, 2*a*. The fourth figure, which bears nothing by which he can certainly be identified, is probably Jonathan, though he may also be Goliath's armour-bearer. We have here an example of the troubles of perspective of which I have already spoken : David and Goliath are no doubt meant to be in the foreground, the two spectators to be together at the back.

Old Testament scenes such as this are not used for their own sake. The characters, events, and scenes of the Old Testament were always looked upon and interpreted as symbols or types of the truths of the New. In David, the shepherd who conquered Goliath and delivered the chosen people, was seen a foreshadowing of the Good Shepherd's victory over Satan, which delivered His chosen people from the consequences of the sin pictured on the preceding panel.

The next panel [19] represents Moses striking the rock. We see the crowd of thirsty Israelites, Moses standing in front with his staff, and the water gushing forth from a hole. The two rows of Israelites are to be

understood as being one behind the other ; it is another illustration of the troubles of perspective. And as before, the scene is chosen for its New Testament application : Christ is the spiritual rock, and the source of living water. It is not infrequent as a device in the Catacombs, and other places where works of Early Christian art are to be found, but is very rare in Celtic art.

The fourth scene [20] represents the adoration of the Infant Christ by the Wise Men from the East. The only point to notice specially is the

FIG. 26.—Magi [20], Moses and the Rock [19]. (*Photograph by* Mr. M'GOOGAN.)

FIG. 27.—Panels [21, 22]. (*Photograph by* Mr. H. S. CRAWFORD.)

number of the Wise Men. Usually three are represented, because of the three-fold gift of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But sometimes, for symmetry's sake, four are found in representations of the scene in the Catacombs, and the same number is shown in this panel. Over the head of the Holy Child is represented the star.

On the opposite face of the stem of the Cross there are only three panels, but these are harder to interpret than the four which have just occupied our attention.

At the bottom is the inscription with the two cats [15]. Above this is a panel [21], which, as has already been said, probably represents the seizure of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. He is standing in the middle, holding a staff, and is arrested by two men with military equipment. A similar representation of the scene occurs in the Book of Kells, and it is also pictured on the Cross of King Flann at Clonmacnois.

The next panel [22] is difficult to explain. The central figure, with

FIG. 28.—Crucifixion [33], Commission to Apostles [23].
(*Photograph by* Mr. M'GOOGAN.)

the right hand raised in benediction, is no doubt Christ. All three figures bear books—a reference to the Gospels. As the figure on the left-hand side of the spectator is stretching out his finger and touching the side of the central figure, I am inclined to suggest that the scene represented may be the incredulity of St. Thomas: if so the panel is quite unique on Irish crosses.

The panel above [23] probably represents the parting commission of the ascending Christ to His Apostles. It will be seen at the bottom of fig. 28. The central figure is seated, a footstool shaped like an animal's

head appearing between His feet. To one of the Apostles He gives a roll, to the other (identified by the eagle above his head with St. John) He gives a book. It is very interesting to see that the roll-form of book had not yet been wholly superseded by the ordinary modern form with leaves. In the famous Gospels of Lindisfarne, which, in spite of its misleading and fictitious colophon, is probably of Irish workmanship, and belongs to the preceding century, there is a portrait of each Evangelist prefixed to his book, as is usual in illuminated MSS. The figure of St. Luke is there represented writing on a roll, the other Evangelists on books. Both forms of book were thus familiar to the Celtic artists.

We have now reached the elaborately sculptured head of the Cross. On the face containing the panels we have just been analysing there is represented the Crucifixion ; on the other face Our Lord, in Glory, presides over the Last Judgment.

Taking first the Crucifixion [33], we see above and below an ornamental pattern consisting of eight snakes with their tails twisted ingeniously ; and at the two sides are groups of spirals connected by S and C curves, like the pattern of spirals previously analysed. The central figure, as is usual in Early Irish representations of the great tragedy, is fully draped, is bound to the Cross, and the arms are stretched straight and horizontal, not bent. The lance-bearer and sponge-bearer, placed symmetrically one on each side, are also regular features of Irish representations of the scene. The two circular knobs between them and the central figure are probably meant for the sun and moon, referring to the darkness at the Crucifixion. A bird at the foot of the Cross is of uncertain meaning ; some suppose it is a symbol of resurrection, others that it typifies the Holy Dove. There is a similar bird *above* the Crucifixion on the High Cross at Kells. Probably the two small figures, a woman and a man kneeling on one knee, are meant for the Virgin Mother and St. John, spectators of the scene. To the two angels supporting the head allusion has already been made.

In the ends of the arms there are groups of figures. In that to the left [34] are six soldiers, four of them armed respectively with bow, shield, sword, and spear. These are no doubt the soldiers assisting at the Crucifixion. At the other extremity [35] is a scene less easy to interpret. It is usually explained as the soldiers watching the tomb, while two angels

above bear up the soul to heaven, the latter being typified by an infant figure supported in a cloth. This way of representing the carrying up of the soul is common enough in monuments of the later Middle Ages, but somehow it does not strike me as either suitable to this particular scene, or congruous with the rest of the Cross. Neither is this the way in which our sculptor was in the habit of representing the scene of the soldiers at the tomb, as may be seen from the other Monasterboice Cross, and the crosses at Clonmacnois, Kells, and Durrow. I have no alternative solution

FIG. 29.—The Last Judgment (panels 30–32).
(*Photograph by* Mr. CRAWFORD.)

to propose, but I am sure that the last word has not been said on this part of the monument.

We now turn to the other face, where the Last Judgment is presented [31]. In the centre stands Christ holding in one hand the Cross, in the other a sceptre with volutes on the head. This sceptre always appears in representations of Our Lord in Glory on Irish work: it was probably suggested by the budding of Aaron's rod.[1] But it is not confined to this scene, or even to Christ. Thus a figure of St. Luke, in the Gospel of St. Chad, shows the same equipment. See fig. 10, No. 14. The staff-head, *ibid.*, No. 14*a*, is not precisely analogous, in that its ends turn up

[1] Compare the cross of Termon Feichin, Plate IIIB.

rather than down, but I can find nothing better. There are a number of small ornamental pins of bronze in the Royal Irish Academy's Collection, in shape precisely similar to this sceptre.

Above the head of Christ is a bird, probably typifying the Holy Spirit under the form of a dove. To the right of the Judge, and occupying the whole of the arm of the Cross, is the choir of the blessed, led by the orchestra which we have already examined. It is an open question whether the figure seated on a chair to the left and blowing a long trumpet is part of the orchestra, or the angel sounding the Last Trump of Judgment : the conspicuous importance given to this figure favours the latter view, but it is noteworthy that the angel has no wings.

The other arm is occupied by the lost. There are fourteen figures, all but one in a crouching attitude : the figure in the bottom right-hand corner seems to have a snake wound round him. A demon drives them to their doom with a violent kick. Behind the demon is a pair of lovers, a sort of Irish Paolo and Francesca, clinging tightly to each other in their agony at finding themselves among the lost. It may be that these two people, separated conspicuously from the rest, are notorious persons of the time, whom the Abbot thus gibbeted. However that may be, I must confess that this detail always seems to me the one departure from what we should call good taste that the sculpture displays : I think we would have been glad had Muiredach spared us this perfectly horrible piece of realism ! Behind these unfortunates comes Satan, with his three-pronged fork.

Underneath the central figure of Christ is an interesting scene [30]. St. Michael the Archangel is weighing the souls in a balance, below which the Evil One is lying at full length, endeavouring by pulling down the empty scale of the balance to influence it in his favour. St. Michael meanwhile is thrusting his staff into Satan's head. This scene cannot be sundered from the three figures at the top [32]—a seated figure with two angels, one on each side. On the lap of the seated figure seems to be an open book, and we can hardly doubt that this represents the recording angel with the Book of Life.

The idea of St. Michael weighing souls is founded on Daniel xii. 1, the Michael there mentioned being interpreted as the archangel, and the " time of trouble " when " thy people shall be delivered, everyone that

shall be found written in the book " being explained as the Final Judgment. The reference to being " weighed in the balances and found wanting " in the same book may possibly have suggested that this was to be the important duty that Michael was to perform on the last day ; but it is an old pagan notion, evolved by the Egyptians and adopted by the Greeks, who committed the function to Hermes. And as Michael, according to the Epistle of Jude, contended with Satan for the body of Moses, and according to Revelation is to go forth with his angels to war against the dragon, it was not unnatural that some such symbolism as is depicted on the Cross should evolve itself. There is no other example of the occurrence of this scene on the Irish crosses, but it is not infrequent in later sculpture. It is, for example, to be seen on a fourteenth century stone in Kildare Cathedral. The shape of the balances, and St. Michael's crutched staff, are to be noticed. See fig. 10, Nos. 12, 12*a*, 13.

On the under-sides and the ends of the arms there are also sculptured figures. The two animals on [39] have already been mentioned. The under-side of the opposite arm [37] contains a hand surrounded by conventionalised clouds. This hand is the symbol of the Divine Father. (Fig. 30.)

In the efforts of early Christians to depict the mysteries of faith, the difficulty of representing the Divine Persons while preserving a fitting reverence was always present. The Son, Who took upon Himself the form of a servant, could be suitably depicted in the form of flesh in which He clothed Himself, or, adapting Apocalyptic symbolism, could be represented as the Lamb. The Holy Spirit, Who had once descended in bodily form as a Dove, could be typified under that gracious likeness. But the Ancient of Days, Whom no man had seen at any time, on Whose face no one could look and live, to limit Him by any figure, however majestic, was felt to be an irreverence. With a very few individual exceptions, it was not till about the twelfth or thirteenth century that artists presumed to make likenesses of God the Father. Before that time the normal way of indicating the Divine intervention in Creation and in Providence was by representing a Hand issuing from the clouds and thick darkness, which psalmist and prophet had described as surrounding the Throne. And here and at Clonmacnois the sculptor has placed the Hand.

But there is a very significant difference between the Hand as figured

on these Irish crosses, and as introduced into such scenes as the Creation, the Crucifixion, and the like. In these the Hand is introduced as part of a scene, carrying the creative power or the benediction from its hidden Divine source to the various characters in the picture. But here at Monasterboice, and at Clonmacnois as well, the Hand fills the whole panel: it is

FIG. 30.—The Divine Hand [37].
(*Photograph by* Mr. M'GOOGAN.)

not, apparently, doing anything. It has no connexion with any of the sculptured scenes, and there seems to be a want of completeness in the picture of the outstretched Hand of Power, fulfilling no apparent purpose.

Nevertheless I think it has a meaning, and that it is put in this particular place with an intention which makes it one of the greatest of the many beauties of the Cross. It is placed on the one part of the Cross where the bystander can see the Hand above his own head. The *spectator*

is in this case the completion of the panel : it is towards *him* that the Hand of Providence is stretched. This panel is, in a sense, the personal message of Muiredach to everyone who throughout the ages should visit the Cross. As in the inscription he begs for a prayer for himself, so in return he pictures the Divine Hand protecting the wayfarer. That it is the *back* of the Hand which is represented need not be a difficulty in the way of this interpretation : the Hand is meant to be extended with the finger-tips downward, and thus we have here another illustration of the attempts made to surmount the practical difficulties of perspective.

FIG. 31.—Pilate washing his Hands [38].

FIG. 32.—Unexplained [36].

(*Photographs by* Mr. M'GOOGAN.)

On the ends of the arms are two scenes. In [38] is what has been reasonably interpreted as Pilate washing his hands. The other scene [36], at the end of the opposite arm, has so far proved an insoluble enigma. It is probably quite simple ; but no one has yet remembered a scene that will fit together three angels, a seated figure holding something unintelligible, and two other figures, one of which is apparently undraped, with rods. I have fancied that it might represent the Scourging of Christ, but I am by no means satisfied with this guess, and I recommend the panel to the attention of anyone interested in solving puzzles.

Last come the four panels in the top of the Cross. Above the Cruci-

fixion is shown one of the Old Testament types of that event—Moses in the Mount, with Aaron and Hur supporting his hands [42]. A horseman, perhaps one of the mystic riders described in the Book of Revelation, occupies one of the end panels [43]—a much effaced pattern of spirals is above his head. The panel is badly weathered and difficult to make out.

The two remaining panels are the only certainly non-scriptural scenes figured on the Cross. They are incidents, or rather successive develop-

FIG. 33.—Moses, Aaron, and Hur [42].

FIG. 34.—Horseman [43].

(*Photographs by* Mr. M'GOOGAN.)

ments of one incident, in the life of the Egyptian hermit St. Antony, the recluse whose example made popular the monastic life. He was born in Egypt about A.D. 250, and from his twentieth year practised asceticism, withdrawing more and more into solitude, till at last he ended his days at an extreme age in a mountain by the shore of the Red Sea, where a monastery still perpetuates his name.

The life of Antony, with the story of his perpetual struggles against the assaults of the powers of evil, has been written by Athanasius, and has made the subject of countless pictures—good, bad, and indifferent. Atha-

nasius, however, says nothing of the incident figured on our Cross, which is recorded by St. Jerome in his life of a contemporary hermit, St. Paul of Thebes. He likewise found refuge from the evil world in the depths of the Egyptian desert. When St. Antony was ninety years of age, and St. Paul twenty-three years older, the former chanced one day to think that no monk more perfect than himself had settled in the desert. The existence of St. Paul was revealed to him in the following night, with a command to go to pay him a visit. Guided over the trackless desert first

FIG. 35.—Meeting of SS. Paul and Antony, panel [41].
(*From a drawing by the author.*)

by a centaur, then by a satyr, and finally by a she-wolf, Antony sought the cave of Paul. At first the older hermit barred the door against the intruder on his solitude, but on Antony's introducing himself and telling his errand, the other with smiles gave him access. As they were conversing, a raven came flying down, and laid before them a whole loaf of bread. " See," said Paul, " the loving and merciful Lord has sent us a loaf. For the last sixty years I have always received half a loaf; but, now thou hast come, Christ has doubled his soldier's rations." Then there arose a dispute as to who should break the bread, which, after a whole day's

discussion, was settled by each seizing the loaf on the side nearest him, pulling, and keeping for himself the part that remained in his hand. For the rest of the story—how Paul died and was buried, and Antony returned to his own dwelling—those interested must be referred to Jerome: the later incidents have nothing to do with the Cross. On this monument may be seen [41] the two aged hermits meeting, each holding his crozier, with the raven above and between them. In the second scene ([40], see fig. 36)

FIG. 36.—Paul and Antony breaking Bread [40].
(*Photograph by* Mr. M'GOOGAN.)

the two hermits are holding the loaf of bread, and the raven is seated on the ground beside them.

It was natural that a conspicuous scene in the life of the founder of monasticism should be pictured in a sculpture adorning a monastery. This particular incident is not infrequent in early sculptures in these islands: indeed, it is the only non-scriptural scene that occurs with a frequency comparable with the favourite scriptural subjects. The most important representation is that on the famous Ruthwell Cross, for here

it is accompanied by a Latin inscription that puts the interpretation of the panel beyond doubt. The same scene is represented on two of the crosses at Kells.

There is a tale told in the Book of Leinster, and also in the Book of Lismore, of how three young Irish clerics went off on pilgrimage over sea, taking no provision but three cakes. One of them, however, took his *caitín* —his pet little cat. On the sea they threw away their oars, and cast themselves on the mercy of the Lord. Soon they came to an island where there was plenty of firewood and water, and built a church. The *caitín* went and caught a salmon, which it brought to them. "Alas!" said they, "no pilgrimage is this on which we are now! We have brought our *caitín* to feed us, and it were pity to eat of what he catches." So they abode without food, till a message came to them from Christ to tell them that on the altar there was half a wheaten cake and a piece of fish for each man. The rest of the story, which in any case is not particularly interesting, does not concern us, but it illustrates, in the first place, the little point about the monastic love of cats which we mentioned at the beginning, and it also illustrates the influence which the life of St. Antony exercised in Ireland; for it is fairly obvious that the story of SS. Paul and Antony has given the suggestion for the plot of this tale of the Irish clerics.

We may very likely hear the Abbot telling his monks some such story as this, illustrating—crudely perhaps, but none the less in simple faith—the promise, *Take no thought saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of such things.*

But just as the Abbot is finishing his homily, a mist falls on the scene, and when it rolls away we find ourselves, as at the first, in the ragged graveyard where the few relics of this ancient centre of Christian worship are mouldering. The Abbot and his monks, Flann the great historian and his pupils, all are gone; their bones lie somewhere in the soil around us, but their graves are forgotten as completely as the grave of Moses.

As a student's library forms part of the world outside, so our little span of life forms part of the long stream of time. Every section of that stream, past and future, is as real as our own, brightened by the same sun,

darkened by the same clouds. The student finds rest and refreshment by leaving his study for a while and wandering among other scenes. As we turn away from the quiet graveyard, and come back to our own century, where the throb of the motor and the whirr of the telephone are ever in our ears, I trust that we too bring back some rest and refreshment from our brief excursion into the world of a thousand years ago.

FIG. 37.—Panel [16]. (*From a drawing by the author.*)

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